

**Passion against All Odds: Love as a Catalyst in Vikas Sharma's *Love and Ego: A Russo-Ukrainian War Saga***



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**Abstract**

The present research paper critically examines the theme *Passion against All Odds: Love as a Catalyst* in Vikas Sharma's *Love and Ego: A Russo-Ukrainian War Saga*. Through the lens of Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism, the novel glorifies multiple dimensions of love. Love, often seen as the most enduring force in human experience, can mould and intensify bonds. It can transcend boundaries—even subdue the wild and uncontrollable. The novelist embraces this notion, and weaves love as the central impetus throughout the narrative. At a surface level, the study identifies two contrasting aspects of love within the novel: the extramarital affairs of two couples, and the organic bond that blossoms between strangers from different nations. The couples, Sachi-Aryendra and Savi-Manindra, challenge traditional notions of pure, soul-deep love, as they engage in postmodern relationships unrestrained by societal expectations. Their love, driven by isolation and chance encounters, devolves into fleeting physical liaisons, much like the characters in Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, where partners are easily exchanged, overshadowing any sense of emotional depth. As the story unfolds, however, a more profound connection emerges between Rada Lee, a Ukrainian captain, and Nathleen, a twice-widowed Russian. Their relationship, built on mutual solace and the warmth of companionship amidst the chaos of war, reveals love's ability to provide safety and comfort, transcending personal histories and national divides.

**Keywords:** Russo-Ukrainian War, love, catalyst, Vikas Sharma, extramarital affairs, postmodern relationships, Bakhtin's dialogism.

### **Introduction**

Psychologically speaking, love and affection are fundamental to human existence. Without them, life can feel like an empty void, lacking meaning and emotional fulfillment. Love provides a sense of purpose, connection, and belonging, while affection nurtures well-being and emotional security. The absence of these essential bonds can lead to feelings of isolation, loneliness, and psychological distress. Love and affection are not merely emotional experiences; they are vital for mental health, fostering resilience, self-esteem, and a sense of identity. Ultimately, they fill the psychological vacuum and enrich the human experience. The same applies to the novel under critical scanner. Love plays a profound and pivotal role both in life and literature. In life, it serves as a cornerstone for human relationships, offering emotional support, connection, and a sense of belonging. It influences personal growth, shapes identities, and fosters resilience.

In literature, love acts as a universal theme that transcends cultural and temporal boundaries, resonating deeply with readers. Whether romantic, familial, or platonic, love in literature mirrors its significance in real life, exploring the complexities of human emotion and experience. Through love, both life and stories are enriched, becoming more meaningful and deeply relatable. It shapes human experiences, relationships, and emotional landscapes, standing as one of the most

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powerful and universal literary themes across cultures and eras. Love manifests in various forms—romantic, familial, platonic, and spiritual—each influencing personal growth, social connections, creativity, and philosophical understanding. It serves as a vital source of emotional support and connection, enriching relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners while providing a deep sense of belonging and fulfillment. The presence of love in literature reflects its profound importance in life, offering readers an opportunity to reflect on their own experiences, relationships, and values. Love thus acts as a bridge between fictional narratives and genuine human emotions, rendering literature deeply resonant and universally relatable.

In *Love and Ego: A Russo-Ukrainian War Saga*, love emerges as the central catalyst within the narrative. However, the novel's portrayal of love leans heavily towards a postmodern interpretation, marked by a strong emphasis on personal freedom and choice, unhindered by traditional social norms or moral expectations. This conceptualization of love allows characters to engage in relationships with a sense of autonomy, exploring emotional and physical bonds without the constraints typically dictated by societal conventions. The novel intricately weaves two dominant themes—love and ego—throughout the storyline. This research paper focuses primarily on love, analyzing how it serves as both a liberating and entangling force, shaping the characters' emotional landscapes and the complex dynamics of their relationships.

**Reimagining Romance: Love within Boundaries**

In *Love and Ego: A Russo-Ukrainian War Saga*, love is intricately woven into the narrative through the psychic dialogism of its characters. Each character reveals their internal struggles, emotional turmoil, and multiple perspectives, reflecting a dynamic stream of consciousness that resonates throughout their psyche. Many of the characters fall in love upon their first encounter, conveying the novelist's message that most of them, either directly or indirectly, are captivated by the powerful grip of passion.

The concept of psychic dialogism, rooted in Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, is central to understanding these internal dynamics. While Bakhtin's dialogism traditionally refers to external dialogues between characters or between a text and its reader, psychic dialogism extends this idea to the realm of internal mental processes. It suggests that within an individual's consciousness, diverse internal voices, perspectives, and thoughts engage in a continuous dialogue, shaped by internal conflicts, social influences, and personal experiences.

The novel's setting spans the National Capital Region (NCR) of India, specifically Greater Noida, Gurugram, Ghaziabad, and Baghpat in Uttar Pradesh. Additionally, the narrative draws upon the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine war, blending local Indian locales with international conflict. The novelist appears to have drawn inspiration from social and digital media to craft the novel's vivid setting. Furthermore, fate, chance, or what may be termed the 'Immanent Will' plays a significant role in bringing together the novel's lovers, emphasizing the unpredictable and profound forces that shape human relationships.

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**Parallels with *Twelfth Night***

The novelist provides readers with background details about the major female characters, Savi and Sachi, revealing that they are residents of Greater Noida. Meanwhile, the key male characters, Manindra and Aryendra, are introduced as former students of Goenka Convent School in Ghaziabad. Aryendra, with hopes of marriage, sets out to meet Sachi, accompanied by Manindra, who earnestly requests to join him on this significant visit.

In *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare explores the theme of love at first sight through several characters, most notably Olivia and Viola (disguised as Cesario). Olivia experiences an instant and overwhelming attraction to Cesario upon their first meeting, despite her initial vow to mourn her brother's death in solitude. Her sudden infatuation is illustrated when she says, "Even so quickly may one catch the plague?/Methinks I feel this youth's perfections" (1.5.-301-02). Likening love to a sudden, uncontrollable affliction. Similarly, Viola, in her guise as Cesario, develops feelings for Duke Orsino after their first encounter, creating a love triangle driven by immediate attraction. This portrayal of love highlights its irrational, impulsive nature, common in Shakespearean comedies, where love ignites quickly, often causing confusion and chaos.

In *Love and Ego: A Russo-Ukrainian War Saga*, a similar scene unfolds where Aryendra, accompanied by Manindra, meets Sachi for the

first time. Aryendra falls in love with Sachi at first sight and readily consents to the idea of marriage. Manindra, captivated by Savi's beauty—compared to the mythical Menaka—finds himself equally enamoured. During dinner, he discreetly passes his contact number to Savi, a gesture well-received, indicating her mutual interest in matrimony, much like Sachi and Aryendra: Let us see how the love-birds react to each other:

The narrative paints a vivid picture of the budding romances. Aryendra is immediately struck by Sachi's charm and, after a brief conversation, appreciates her sweet yet confident demeanour. Though his feelings are clear, the final decision is deferred to his parents, who are to visit on Sunday. Both Savi and Sachi are described as young and radiant, blossoming like flowers in spring. Savi, present during Aryendra's visit, draws Manindra's attention at once, sparking an infatuation that parallels Aryendra's feelings for Sachi. The moment is sealed when Manindra gives his contact information to Savi, symbolizing the mutual interest shared by the two couples. (Sharma 18)

All four couples in the novel are married at the same mandap, radiating happiness on this momentous occasion. As the night they have eagerly anticipated arrives, Savi is overwhelmed with desire and kisses her husband passionately while unbuttoning his shirt. Under Cupid's spell, she becomes almost uncontrollable. Manindra responds with equal fervor, kissing her and immersing himself in a realm of physical pleasure. Both are intensely aroused. He finds himself in a whirlwind of passion, but Savi gently asks him to be a bit more tender; although he's lost in the moment, her sighs and moans signal her need for gentleness. They share an intimate

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connection for about twenty minutes before taking a brief pause. Their bond feels electric, and soon they reignite their passionate encounter. Let's have a look at this:

As they surrendered to their passion, their kisses grew more intense. Manindra's longing for this moment was palpable, and he reciprocated her fervour with equal ardour. Their intimacy deepened, and they lost themselves in each other. After a tender exploration of her body, they united in a fervent embrace. Though she whispered a gentle plea for restraint, Manindra's fervour consumed him, and her soft sighs and moans filled the air. Their passion culminated in a shared moment of ecstasy. (19-20)

Sachi and Aryendra's union was arranged, lacking the spark of romance. Their initial interactions, including a few meetings and phone conversations, left them both slightly apprehensive. However, on their wedding night, Aryendra's affinity for alcohol left Sachi underwhelmed. Despite her reservations, she felt compelled to acquiesce. Aryendra's charming words and gentle touch gradually eased her apprehensions. As he affectionately admired her features – her captivating eyes, inviting lips, and radiant smile – Sachi's defences dissolved. Their intimate encounter began with tender foreplay, fostering a deep connection. Eventually, they shared a passionate night, their love blossoming in each other's arms, filled with warmth and affection. Let's have a look at the live show:

Sachi's expectations were tempered on their first night together, as Aryendra's scent of alcohol wafted through the air. Though the smell of vodka initially unsettled her, Aryendra's charming words and gentle touch soon won her over. With tender endearments, he lavished praise on her captivating eyes, luscious lips, and radiant smile. His kisses ignited a passion that overshadowed her initial reservations. As their intimacy deepened, Sachi's apprehensions melted away. Aryendra's affectionate caresses and sweet whispers dissolved her resistance, and they surrendered to their desire. Their night became a tender exploration, filled with foreplay and passionate lovemaking. Twice, they lost themselves in each other's arms, their connection growing stronger with each tender moment. As the night drew to a close, they drifted off to sleep, entwined in a warm, loving embrace. (20)

### **Transcending Borders: The Interplay of Love across Nations**

Love, as a universal emotion, is not bound by local, national, or international borders. It transcends cultures, languages, and geographic divides, connecting people from different nations and backgrounds. Throughout history, literature, and human experience, love has often overcome political, cultural, and social obstacles. In literature, this theme is prevalent in stories of love crossing boundaries, such as Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, which exemplifies love overcoming social and familial divides, or Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, where love endures amid national conflict.



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Vikas Sharma's *Love and Ego: A Russo-Ukrainian War Saga* is a contemporary example of this global spirit of love, where emotions travel from India to the war-torn Russo-Ukrainian setting. The novel portrays a love story between Rada Lee, a Ukrainian captain, and Nathleen, a two-time Russian widow, who find solace and warmth in each other's arms amidst the chaos of war. With globalization and modern technology, national boundaries have diminished, allowing people to connect and fall in love across vast distances, and this novel beautifully captures the resilience of love in the face of international conflict.

As regards history, Russia was the largest republic within the Soviet Union, which dissolved on December 26, 1991. This dissolution led to the creation of 15 independent countries, including Russia, Ukraine, and others such as Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, and several Central Asian states. The collapse of the Soviet Union marked a significant geopolitical shift, with former Soviet republics charting their own political and economic paths. Tensions between Russia and Ukraine, which culminated in the dramatic escalation of the conflict on February 22, 2022, can be traced back to these post-Soviet developments. The immediate catalyst for this conflict was Russia's military aggression, but the deeper context involves Ukraine's desire to integrate more closely with Western institutions like the European Union (EU) and NATO. Since the 2014 Euromaidan protests, Ukraine has distanced itself from Russian influence, aspiring to align with Western Europe. Russia, in turn, viewed Ukraine's potential NATO membership as a direct threat to its sphere of

influence, fearing that NATO forces could be stationed too close to its borders, thus fuelling the ongoing tensions and eventual war.

### **Zen-Sky's Command: Navigating Leadership in Times of Crisis**

The clash between Russia and Ukraine significantly disrupted the socio-economic, administrative, and communicative landscape. The novelist poignantly captures this in the lines, “No news, no tension. No Newspapers, no reactions. No freedom of speech, no criticism of Russian policy!” (31). Under the leadership of Zen-Sky, the Ukrainian president, the nation emphasized self-governance and self-administration, viewing these principles as symbols of their self-respect. However, Phu-tin, the Russian president, interpreted this stance as Zen-Sky's ego, prompting him to “teach a lesson” to the Ukrainian leader. This deepened the rift between the two countries, culminating in Russia's sudden attack on Ukrainian cities like Bucha.

Zen-Sky, determined to preserve Ukraine's autonomy, organized national programs in schools, colleges, and other institutions, instilling values of nationalism, heroism, liberty, and courage among the population. Despite Russia's attempts to pressure Ukraine into submission, the Ukrainian people, under Zen-Sky's leadership, rejected the idea of being subjected to Russian control. The values of “courage, zest, bravery, heroism, nationalism, and liberty were emphasized in particular,” and Ukrainians were urged to remain free in spirit, resisting tyranny (32). Zen-Sky, rallying the nation with a powerful speech, declared, “Prestige once gone rarely returns,” signaling his resolve to teach Russia a hard

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lesson (32). As Russian forces quickly captured Bucha, Zen-Sky used rhetorical strategies to inspire his people, asking whether they preferred self-governance and respect or to be enslaved by Russia. This psychological and rhetorical dialogism proved highly motivating, leading Zen-Sky to launch a counterattack on the Russian Kremlin the following day.

**Moments of Desire: A Tapestry of Passion and Emotion**

Amid a lethal and vengeful conflict, compounded by snowfall and darkness, the Ukrainian soldiers struggled to move swiftly and found themselves in dire straits. Captain Rada Lee fell behind and became separated from his team. Seeking refuge, he climbed the stairs of a five-story apartment building and knocked on an unfamiliar door.

“Who is there?” a female voice inquired from inside.

“I am Rada Lee. I need your help, or else I’ll be murdered by the forces.”

“Wait a minute,” came the response.

Nathleen, pausing her reading of Eugene O’Neill’s *Desire Under the Elms*, hesitated before opening the door. “Alright, come in please!” she said (33).

What followed was an engaging dialogue between them, with Nathleen introducing herself as a postgraduate in English and Mass Communication from Harvard University. She revealed that her father was a Colonel in the Russian army (33). As she prepared coffee, they began to sip it together, accompanied by pancakes. In this intimate setting, Cupid began to work his magic. Rada found himself increasingly drawn to her, his gaze

lingering on her physique and beautiful features. While eating, he observed her pretty face and gentle smile. Now feeling warm and satisfied, he also noticed her slender wrists, long hair, and the thin nightie she wore, which accentuated her figure. “She could guess what he was looking at” (35).

Rada shared his plight, explaining that he had been compelled to join the war due to unemployment and the devastated Ukrainian economy. He lamented that the number of unemployed had skyrocketed as nations supporting Russia cut ties, leaving Ukrainians without bread for five months. With empty pockets, he had no choice but to leave home and fight. During their magnetic conversation, Nathleen playfully asked for more coffee, assuring him there would be no charge. She expressed her loneliness and desire for company to fill the void in her life. Rada sought reassurance that she wouldn’t turn him over to the Russian army, to which she replied, “Feel assured of your security. After all, I’m a human being above hatred and national prejudices” (35). Moved by her words, Rada hugged her tightly, and she responded playfully, “You are crossing the limits” (35).

### **The Heart of Humanity: The Importance of Human Companionship**

Nathleen felt a sense of happiness in Rada’s company, free from hatred and prejudice, as she finally had someone to share her space with. She welcomed his caresses without resistance, leading him to a comfortable bed where he could finally rest and find solace after many sleepless nights. As dawn broke, he awoke to see Nathleen moving about,

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presumably heading to the kitchen for a glass of water. He followed her, requesting the same. Grateful for the companionship that had come to her during such trying times, she felt blessed. The atmosphere was charged with romance, and as he stepped forward to kiss her, the moment ignited their connection. She reciprocated, deepening their embrace, and the intimacy grew as he kissed her neck and held her waist, all illuminated by the soft glow of a single candle. Let's see what happens:

She guided him to the bedroom, candle in one hand and his hand in the other. Together, they explored each other's bodies, savoring the moment, until he entered her. It was a significant milestone for him, marking his first experience with a Russian woman, and he felt a rush of delight. The union felt revitalizing for both; Rada brought his Ukrainian strength, while Nathleen felt awakened from a prolonged emotional slumber. After sharing a hot shower, they fell asleep in each other's arms, having split four pancakes with mashed potatoes (36).

The next morning, Nathleen prepared breakfast, though it lacked the usual flavours due to the dire circumstances—markets were closed, and supplies were scarce. With only flour on hand, she managed to make pancakes but no omelettes or toast. Rada felt guilty for being a burden during such challenging times and encouraged her to use whatever was available in her kitchen. She reassured him, expressing joy in his sweet and sensual presence, and reflected on love's profound importance. The novelist writes about the power of love, "It is love that wins everybody and every situation... I had very little stored because I live alone and my needs are meager. I was longing for some human company. Instead of being a burden, you've removed my boredom and loneliness" (39). She said,

radiating happiness in his presence. As she offered her hand for a kiss, he obliged, pulling her into a warm embrace. While she washed the dishes, he watched her with admiration, perceiving her as a fairy, enchanted by her gentle demeanour that belied her upbringing as a Colonel's daughter. Their connection deepened, revealing the essence of their dialogue:

As she extended her hand for him to kiss, he took it and hugged her tightly. "Have patience, Leel!" she playfully responded. With every glance he cast upon her, he found himself captivated by her sweet voice and the warmth of her presence, devoid of any arrogance tied to her background (39).

### **Analysis**

The paper beautifully captures the complexities of love and its vital role both in life and literature, particularly in Vikas Sharma's *Love and Ego: A Russo-Ukrainian War Saga*. our exploration of psychological aspects, narrative dynamics, and character interactions offers a deep insight into how love serves as a powerful force, shaping identities and emotional landscapes amid challenging circumstances. Overall, this examination serves as a compelling entry point for our research paper, allowing for a rich exploration of how love manifests in various forms and impacts the human experience within both literary and real-world contexts. It will be interesting to see how we develop this analysis further in our paper!

### **Research Findings**

- i. **Love as a Central Catalyst:** In *Love and Ego: A Russo-Ukrainian War Saga*, love is portrayed as a multifaceted force that serves as both a liberating and entangling agent. It becomes the catalyst that

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shapes the characters' emotional landscapes, influencing their decisions and relationships. Love in the novel is framed within a postmodern context, where characters navigate their feelings with a strong sense of autonomy, free from traditional social expectations. This freedom, however, comes with complexities and consequences, mirroring real-life struggles of balancing love, ego, and individual desires.

- ii. **Psychic Dialogism and Internal Conflicts:** The concept of psychic dialogism, adapted from Mikhail Bakhtin, plays a significant role in the novel, offering insight into the internal mental conflicts of the characters. This continuous internal dialogue reflects their emotional turmoil, personal desires, and the societal forces that influence them. The characters' love lives are marked by internal debates about their choices, the influence of fate, and the unpredictable nature of human relationships, particularly in times of crisis like the Russo-Ukrainian war.
- iii. **Interplay of Love and Ego:** The novel presents a delicate balance between love and ego, where love is not always a harmonious or selfless emotion but can be intertwined with personal ambitions and desires. The ego drives certain characters' actions, shaping their relationships in complex ways. For example, Zen-Sky's leadership during the war reflects both his love for his country and his personal ego, while characters like Rada Lee and Nathleen

experience love as both a solace and a struggle against the pressures of war.

- iv. **Love Transcending Boundaries:** The novel highlights love's ability to transcend national, cultural, and political boundaries. The romantic relationship between Rada Lee, a Ukrainian captain, and Nathleen, a Russian widow, serves as a metaphor for love's universal power to bridge divides, even in the midst of a war. This connection between the personal and the geopolitical underscores love's capacity to heal and connect individuals, regardless of the larger conflicts surrounding them.
- v. **Comparative Literary Analysis:** The novel draws parallels with classic literary works, such as Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and *Romeo and Juliet*, where love at first sight and irrational, impulsive passion are central themes. In *Love and Ego*, Aryendra and Manindra's immediate infatuation with Sachi and Savi echoes these classical love tropes. This comparative analysis reinforces the idea that love in literature remains a timeless and universal theme, consistently reflecting the complexities of human relationships across cultures and eras.
- vi. **Love as Emotional Refuge in Times of Crisis:** Amid the backdrop of war, love serves as an emotional refuge for the characters, offering them solace and companionship in the face of isolation and fear. The novel illustrates how human connection becomes even more essential during times of crisis, as seen in the



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relationship between Nathleen and Rada Lee. Their love story, emerging in the context of political and social chaos, underscores the importance of love as a source of resilience and survival in difficult times.

**Conclusion**

The study of *Love and Ego: A Russo-Ukrainian War Saga* reveals that love operates as a powerful and multifaceted force, driving both personal growth and interpersonal dynamics. Through psychic dialogism, the novel delves into the internal struggles of its characters, revealing how love, ego, and desire interact within their emotional landscapes. The portrayal of love in the novel reflects both its liberating and entangling effects, showing that while love can offer freedom and connection, it can also lead to personal conflict and difficult choices. Love transcends national and cultural boundaries, reinforcing its role as a universal human experience that unites individuals, even amidst the chaos of war.

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**Declaration:** This is to certify that the present paper titled **Passion against All Odds: Love as a Catalyst in Vikas Sharma's *Love and Ego: A Russo-Ukrainian War Saga*** is my original contribution and has not been sent anywhere else for publication.

**Brief Bio of the Author**

The author is a postgraduate scholar of English literature in the final year of 2024-25 in the Department of English Studies & Research, Jagdish Saran Hindu (P. G.) College Amroha, affiliated to Mahatma Jyotiba Phule University, Bareilly, (U.P.), India. In addition, she reflects a great interest in classical singing, drawing, and doing mandala paintings. She is a bilingual author. She writes on burning topics like Feminism, Women Empowerment, Gender Discrimination, and Ecofeminism. She composes poetry. Some of her poems are titled "Query of the Green," "Caged," "The Darkest White," and "Unspoken Mitier". They have been published in national and international anthologies such as *Heart upon Sleeve*, *Post-colonial Praxis: Ramifications and Intricacies*, *Poems from Best Poets*, and *World through Poetic Sensibility* respectively. She also has many pages of motivational and inspirational quotes on social media. Her passion is singing, but her profession is to serve in higher education.