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The Psychological and Political Dimensions of Identity in Post-Cold War Geopolitics: A Literary Exploration of *Love and Ego*

Aparna Chauhan

ORCID <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3482-0475>

Corresponding Author: Aparna Chauhan is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at the prestigious University of Delhi, rajasamy108@gmail.com

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Abstract

Aim: This study examines the complex relationship between psychological identity formation and geopolitical dynamics in the post-Cold War era through a literary analysis of Vikas Sharma's novel 'Love and Ego'. The research investigates how national ego and individual leadership psychology influence international relations and state sovereignty by drawing on the allegorical representation of Russian-Ukrainian relations in Sharma's work, particularly through the characters of Zen-Sky and Phu-tin. **Methodology and Approach:** The author consulted primary and secondary sources for her research. Further, the researcher has applied a multidisciplinary approach, combining literary criticism with political psychology to analyze how historical narratives shape national identity and foreign policy decisions.

Outcome: The paper contributes to our understanding of how psychological factors, especially ego-driven motivations, continue to shape the contemporary global order and impact governance structures in emerging democracies. This analysis offers valuable insights into the intersection of national identity, political leadership, and international conflict in the modern era.

Conclusion and Suggestion: The findings reveal a dialectical tension between ego as a catalyst for national self-determination and as a potentially destructive force in international relations. Through close textual analysis, the research demonstrates how Sharma's fictional narrative illuminates real-world geopolitical tensions, particularly in post-Soviet spaces.

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The termination of the Cold War in the late twentieth century precipitated fundamental changes in global geopolitical structures, primarily catalyzed by the Soviet Union's dissolution. This transformation generated a complex matrix of newly sovereign states, each seeking to establish distinct political and cultural identities within the international system. The emergence of these independent nations, previously constrained under Soviet hegemony, manifested a remarkable resurgence of suppressed national identities, fundamentally altering the regional power dynamics. The literary work "Love and Ego" by Prof. Sharma, provides a sophisticated analytical framework for examining these geopolitical transformations through the lens of national and individual ego manifestations. The narrative construct employs the Russo-Ukrainian conflict as a paradigmatic case study, demonstrating the intricate relationship between leadership psychology and national identity formation. Through the characterization of Zen-Sky and Phu-tin, Sharma develops a nuanced analysis of competing national narratives and their implications for regional stability.

The textual evidence presents Zen-Sky as an embodiment of Ukrainian national consciousness, exemplified through his assertive declaration of sovereignty. His declaration, "We have our sovereignty" (p.12). This proclamation functions as both a political statement and a psychological marker of national identity reconstruction. His strategic pursuit of NATO membership, characterized as "essential for Ukraine to step out of Russia's shadow and into the global arena" (p.15), demonstrates the intersection of security politics and national identity formation.

Conversely, Phu-tin's characterization illustrates the psychological complexity of the post-imperial identity crisis. His assertion that "Ukraine was a part of old Russia" (p.40) reveals the persistent influence of historical narratives on contemporary geopolitical perspectives. This positioning reflects a broader pattern of post-imperial psychology, where former dominant powers struggle to reconcile historical status with contemporary political realities.

The collective dimension of national identity formation is further exemplified through public discourse within the Ukrainian context. The rhetorical question posed to youth, "Do you want to survive as slaves of the Russian system?" (p.18), demonstrates the role of generational consciousness in national

identity construction. This narrative framework establishes a clear delineation between historical subordination and contemporary aspirations for autonomy, highlighting the psychological dimensions of post-Soviet state formation.

The manifestation of national identity in post-Soviet states presents a complex duality, simultaneously serving as a source of empowerment and potential instability, particularly in relation to Russian geopolitical interests. Through character-driven analysis, Sharma illuminates the intersection of personal and political dimensions in leadership dynamics. The narrative demonstrates how individual ego can amplify international tensions, as evidenced in Zen-Sky's confrontational response to Phu-tin: "Who are you to keep me from this honour?" (p.25). This interaction exemplifies the transformation of ideological differences into personalized conflicts, illustrating how leadership personalities can escalate diplomatic tensions into intractable disputes.

The text presents a critical examination of ego's destructive potential when it supersedes rational governance principles. Sharma's portrayal of warfare's consequences—encompassing civilian casualties, economic deterioration, and social fragmentation—provides empirical evidence of ego-driven policy failures. This is particularly evident in Zen-Sky's retrospective observation: "What will be the fate of the orphans? Disgusting! Didn't look into the dark before leaping into the dangerous pit!" (p.35). This self-reflective moment serves as a profound critique of leadership decisions driven by ego rather than strategic consideration of humanitarian consequences.

Through this integrated analysis of personal and collective narratives, the research demonstrates the complex interplay between national identity formation and ego in post-Cold War geopolitical dynamics. The study reveals how the resurrection of national identities, while fundamental to state sovereignty, can potentially catalyze conflict when combined with unrestrained pride. The Russo-Ukrainian conflict serves as a paradigmatic case study, illustrating the persistent challenges of maintaining equilibrium between national identity assertion and pragmatic international relations in an increasingly interconnected global system.

The relationship between ego and national identity emerges as a critical determinant in post-Cold War geopolitical dynamics, particularly within nations seeking to establish their position in a transformed international order. This

analysis examines how collective self-perception, grounded in shared historical experiences and cultural narratives, intersects with national ego as a catalyst for international positioning and sovereign assertion.

Sharma's "Love and Ego" provides a theoretical framework for examining this phenomenon through the Russo-Ukrainian conflict paradigm. The characterization of Zen-Sky as Ukraine's Prime Minister exemplifies the manifestation of collective ego in national leadership. His declaration, "We have our sovereignty" (p.12), represents more than a political statement; it embodies the transformation of historical subjugation into contemporary self-assertion. The strategic pursuit of NATO membership, framed as an escape from "Russia's shadow" (p.15), demonstrates how ego influences national security decisions, even when such choices risk regional stability.

The analysis reveals how national consciousness campaigns utilize ego as a mechanism for social cohesion. The rhetorical question posed to Ukrainian citizens—"Do you wish to breathe freely, or remain slaves to Russian oppression?" (p.18)—illustrates the deployment of ego in constructing collective identity. This phenomenon aligns with Anderson's theoretical framework of "imagined communities," where shared narratives facilitate collective consciousness formation across disparate populations.

Conversely, Phu-tin's characterization provides insight into post-imperial ego manifestation. His statement that "Ukraine was a part of old Russia" (p.40) reflects the psychological complexity of imperial decline, corresponding with Zakaria's analysis in "The Post-American World" regarding the challenges former empires face in adapting to diminished global influence. This perspective demonstrates how historical identity can impede adaptation to contemporary geopolitical realities.

The intersection of personal ego and political leadership emerges as a critical factor in post-Cold War geopolitical dynamics. Sharma's narrative illustrates this through Phu-tin's cautionary statement, "Pride goes before a fall" (p.42), which exemplifies the destabilizing potential of unchecked leadership ego. This observation aligns with Orwell's analysis in "Notes on Nationalism" regarding the dual nature of nationalist psychology—encompassing both intentional dishonesty and unconscious self-deception. The research demonstrates

how this psychological framework manifests in contemporary leadership decisions, particularly in contexts of territorial disputes and sovereignty claims. Leadership emerges as a crucial variable in this transformation, with individual ego significantly influencing the developmental trajectories of emergent nation-states. Sharma's character constructions provide a theoretical framework for analyzing leadership psychology in transitional political contexts. Thus it establishes a theoretical foundation for understanding how leadership ego influences national identity formation and international relations in post-Cold War contexts, while highlighting the complex interplay between personal psychology and political decision-making.

The novel also explores the burden of leadership within fragmented states. Zen-Sky's reflection, "Every step feels like a gamble, every decision weighed against a history of oppression" (35), encapsulates the profound pressure leaders experience when navigating the delicate balance between personal ego and pragmatic governance.

In *Love and Ego*, the confrontation between Zen-Sky and Phu-tin represents not only a clash of personalities but also a geopolitical struggle. Phu-tin's assertion, "Ukraine was and will always be part of Russia" (40), reflects the imperial ego of a leader unwilling to relinquish influence. This perspective echoes the rhetoric of post-imperial leaders, such as Margaret Thatcher, who during the debates over Scottish independence remarked, "Unity is strength, and fragmentation weakens us all." Like Thatcher, Phu-tin perceives fragmentation as a threat to the legacy and cohesion of a once-powerful entity.

Zen-Sky's retort, "Who are you to decide our fate?" (25), embodies the resistance of smaller nations asserting their sovereignty against larger powers. This echoes the defiance of India's Jawaharlal Nehru, who, in the post-colonial era, stated, "We may be a small nation, but we are not insignificant. We will chart our own path." While such defiance is crucial for asserting national sovereignty, it often exacerbates conflict when egos collide, as illustrated both in *Love and Ego* and in historical reality. The novel further highlights how fragmentation presents unique challenges for leadership. Zen-Sky reflects on the economic hardships faced by Ukraine, lamenting, "How can we build a nation when our people are crying for bread?" (53). This captures the dual responsibility of leaders in

fragmented states: cultivating a national identity while simultaneously addressing the immediate needs of their people.

From Phu-tin's perspective, the ego-driven desire to reverse fragmentation is evident. His remark, "Pride blinds us to the cost of reunification" (44), acknowledges the destructive potential of ego-centric policies. This aligns with George Orwell's critique in *Politics and the English Language*, where he argues, "The desire to impose one's will is often cloaked in the language of necessity, but it is ultimately a pursuit of power." Phu-tin's actions exemplify this dynamic, as his pursuit of reunification with Ukraine leads to significant social and economic devastation.

Ultimately, *Love and Ego* critiques the consequences of ego-driven leadership, highlighting the profound human and societal costs. Zen-Sky's reflection, "What will become of the widows and orphans of this war?" (35), underscores the collateral damage that often results from policies driven by personal pride and ambition. Similarly, Phu-tin's acknowledgment, "Imperialism breeds its own nemesis" (44), suggests an awareness of the unsustainable nature of his actions, even as he continues to pursue them.

Historical identity serves as a crucial foundation for a nation's sense of self, shaping its collective ego and driving its actions within the geopolitical sphere. For nations emerging from the shadows of colonialism, imperialism, or fragmentation, historical narratives often become key instruments for asserting identity, reclaiming sovereignty, and fostering unity. In *Love and Ego* by Vikas Sharma, historical identity plays a central role, particularly in the depiction of Ukraine's ongoing struggle against Russia. The novel illustrates how collective memory and historical experiences shape national ego, frequently propelling nations toward confrontation. This analysis explores the role of historical identity in shaping ego within the novel, while also drawing comparisons to other works that similarly address the impact of history on national consciousness. In *Love and Ego*, Ukraine's historical identity is portrayed as both a burden and a source of strength. Zen-Sky's leadership is profoundly influenced by the legacy of Ukrainian subjugation under the Soviet Union. His declaration, "We are no longer a colony of Russia; we are a nation reborn" (12), embodies Ukraine's effort to reclaim its sovereignty and assert a distinct identity. This statement underscores

how historical oppression fuels a collective ego, motivating nations to declare their independence and seek recognition on the global stage. The novel illustrates that, for nations like Ukraine, historical trauma often transforms into a driving force for self-determination.

Further, *Love and Ego* delves into how historical identity shapes public consciousness and national rhetoric. Ukrainian leaders emphasize the sacrifices made by their ancestors in speeches, asserting, “Do not forget the blood spilled for this land. Let our ancestors’ courage guide us” (18). Such rhetoric taps into collective memory, invoking the past as a unifying force that strengthens the nation’s resolve. Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagined communities” provides a valuable lens for understanding this phenomenon, suggesting that shared histories and narratives create a sense of solidarity among citizens, regardless of geographic dispersion.

In contrast, Russia’s historical identity, as depicted in the novel, is deeply rooted in its legacy as a former superpower. Phu-tin’s lament, “Russia’s greatness is carved in the stones of history; we cannot let it crumble” (40), reflects the imperial ego born from Russia’s once-dominant status. His refusal to acknowledge Ukraine’s sovereignty stems from an ingrained belief that Ukraine is an integral part of Russia’s historical and cultural identity. This perspective resonates with Fareed Zakaria’s observation in *The Post-American World*, where he notes that “Great powers are often haunted by their histories, unable to adjust to a reality where they are no longer dominant.” Phu-tin’s outlook also aligns with Edward Said’s analysis in *Culture and Imperialism*, where imperial powers are shown to struggle with relinquishing control over former colonies. Said argues, “Imperialism leaves behind a contested space, where power is fought over as much in memory as in reality.” In *Love and Ego*, this contested space is manifest in the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, as both nations draw upon their historical identities to justify their actions and reinforce their respective egos. Thus, the novel highlights how historical identity shapes the collective ego, often fuelling nationalistic ambitions and creating enduring tensions. For both Ukraine and Russia, the weight of history significantly influences their present-day interactions, with each nation’s ego serving as both a source of strength and a catalyst for conflict.

While historical identity can serve as a source of unity and resilience, *Love and Ego* critiques its potential to perpetuate conflict. Zen-Sky's reflection, "History binds us, but it also blinds us to the possibilities of peace" (35), underscores the dangers of allowing historical grievances to dominate contemporary decision-making. This sentiment echoes Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's warning in her essay *The Danger of a Single Story*, where she argues, "To insist on only one narrative is to flatten the complexities of a people." In the novel, both Ukraine and Russia risk becoming trapped in narrow interpretations of their respective histories, hindering progress and preventing reconciliation.

The burden of historical identity also permeates personal narratives. Kathleen, a Russian citizen, reflects on her father's service in the Soviet army, stating, "My father lived for the empire, and now I live with its ruins" (42). Her words reveal the personal toll of a national identity shaped by history, resonating with themes explored in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*, where generational trauma stemming from colonialism continues to affect characters long after the initial events. In both novels, historical identity is deeply intertwined with collective trauma, shaping not only national consciousness but individual lives.

In *Love and Ego*, historical identity is portrayed as a source of both resilience and ongoing conflict. This is especially evident in Ukraine's memory of Soviet domination. The novel evokes the painful recollections of the Holodomor, stating, "We have endured starvation, suppression, and suffering, but we have not lost our spirit" (53). While this resilience is a hallmark of historical identity, it also serves as a wellspring of enduring conflict, as past injustices continue to fuel present-day tensions and animosities. The characters' struggles highlight how historical trauma can perpetuate cycles of discord, preventing nations from overcoming the legacies of their pasts.

Ego-driven politics often result in profound and far-reaching consequences for both nations and their citizens. While ego can inspire leaders to assert bold visions and pursue ambitious goals, it frequently blinds them to pragmatic solutions, fosters unnecessary conflicts, and exacerbates human suffering. In *Love and Ego*, Vikas Sharma explores the destructive outcomes of political decisions driven by pride and self-importance, particularly within the context of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. The novel powerfully portrays the societal, economic, and

personal costs of ego-driven politics, offering a critique that resonates with both historical and contemporary realities. The consequences of such decisions are far-reaching, impacting not only the leaders who make them but also the citizens who bear the brunt of their actions. Ego-driven politics often transform ideological or territorial disputes into prolonged, destructive conflicts. In *Love and Ego*, Phu-tin's refusal to accept Ukraine's sovereignty exemplifies this dynamic. His assertion, "Pride demands that Russia remains whole, even if it means war" (40), reveals how ego can prevent leaders from considering peaceful alternatives and exacerbate conflicts. This obstinate pride prevents diplomatic resolution and escalates tensions, creating a cycle of hostility. Zen-Sky's defiance, while grounded in a legitimate desire for independence, also reflects the influence of ego. His declaration, "We cannot bow to Russia, no matter the cost" (25), shows how pride can escalate conflicts by prioritizing symbolic victories over practical solutions. This mirrors real-world examples, such as the Vietnam War, where national pride on both sides fueled a prolonged and devastating conflict. As historian Barbara Tuchman observed in *The March of Folly*: "Pride, like folly, moves nations to pursue policies contrary to their interests." In both the novel and history, pride often impedes rational decision-making, prolonging suffering.

One of the most tragic consequences of ego-driven politics is the toll it takes on civilians. In *Love and Ego*, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine leads to widespread devastation, with the narrative stating, "Missiles destroyed homes and hospitals; the cries of the wounded echoed through the streets. Yet, the leaders remained resolute in their egos" (48). This vivid depiction emphasizes how leaders' pride often results in the displacement, injury, and death of countless innocents. Such a dynamic mirrors real-world conflicts like the Syrian Civil War, where ego-driven decisions by both domestic and international actors have created one of the largest humanitarian crises of modern times. As Sharma critiques in *Love and Ego*, "While leaders debate territory, it is the people who lose their homes, their loved ones, and their futures" (50).

Ego-driven politics also have the potential to isolate nations diplomatically, diminishing their influence and opportunities for collaboration. In *Love and Ego*, Phu-tin's aggressive stance leads to Russia's increasing isolation from the international community. The line, "Even old allies turned away, unable

to condone such reckless pride” (59), illustrates how ego can alienate former partners and erode a nation’s global standing. This is reminiscent of historical instances such as the Cold War-era ostracization of apartheid South Africa, where the government’s refusal to relinquish its policies led to widespread international condemnation and sanctions. Similarly, Sharma critiques how ego-driven policies undermine alliances, noting, “Ego builds walls where bridges are needed” (61). Such isolation further entrenches conflict and reduces opportunities for diplomatic resolution.

Leaders who pursue ego-driven politics often risk losing the trust of both their citizens and the international community. In *Love and Ego*, Zen-Sky’s introspection reveals his awareness of this danger: “What will my people think of me if our dreams of independence lead only to ashes?” (35). This recognition highlights how ego, when its consequences become clear, can erode a leader’s credibility and alienate those they aim to serve. The novel suggests that the long-term effects of ego-driven politics often outweigh the short-term gains, undermining both personal legacies and national well-being.

Ego, while an inherent aspect of leadership and national identity, becomes perilous when it overshadows pragmatism and empathy. In Vikas Sharma’s *Love and Ego*, the devastating consequences of ego-driven politics are starkly illustrated through the lens of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. From escalating violence and humanitarian crises to economic collapse and diplomatic isolation, the novel portrays how the intertwining of leaders’ pride and their nations’ historical identities fosters destructive outcomes. The narrative critiques the dangers of allowing ego to dominate decision-making, showing how it blinds leaders to the human costs of their actions and jeopardizes the very identities they strive to protect. Through Zen-Sky’s defiance and Phu-tin’s imperial ambitions, *Love and Ego* underscores the fragile boundary between asserting sovereignty and inciting conflict. The novel serves as a cautionary tale, drawing clear parallels to real-world history, where ego-driven politics have led to wars, economic turmoil, and fractured societies. By highlighting these patterns, the story urges a re-examination of leadership and diplomacy, advocating for a balance between national pride and humility, and promoting collaboration over confrontation.

Ultimately, *Love and Ego* is not just a critique of past events but a stark warning for the future. It reminds us that while ego can drive nations to greatness, it must be tempered with responsibility and foresight to avoid catastrophic consequences. The study identifies a paradoxical relationship between ego's empowering and destructive potentials in national leadership. Through character-driven analysis, the research reveals how leadership ego simultaneously functions as a catalyst for national self-determination and a potential source of conflict escalation. This duality is particularly evident in the psychological evolution of both primary characters, as demonstrated through their reflective moments regarding conflict consequences. The research thus identifies a fundamental tension between ego as a catalyst for national self-determination and as a potential source of international conflict, particularly in post-Soviet contexts where historical identities intersect with contemporary sovereignty assertions.

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Aparna Chauhan

Aparna Chauhan is Assistant Professor in the Department of English at the prestigious University of Delhi. With a deep passion for literature and cultural studies, she is dedicated to teaching, mentoring, and contributing to the field of English studies through her insightful research and scholarship. She is currently pursuing a PhD at Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut. Aparna's doctoral research focuses on "*Diasporic Encounter and Dissidence of Sheroes in Select Novels of Buchi Emecheta and Jhumpa Lahiri: A Comparative Study*." Her academic interests include postcolonial literature, diasporic narratives, feminist studies, and cross-cultural encounters. With her commitment to scholarly excellence and her passion for exploring the complexities of identity, migration, and resistance, she continues to inspire both her students and the broader academic community.