



LOCATING LESBIANISM: AN ADOLESCENT DEFENCE MECHANISM OF RESISTANCE

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Abstract: The relation between psychology and literature gained momentum when Sigmund Freud introduced the groundbreaking theory of psychoanalysis. The psychoanalytic approach to analysing literary works brought to light the complexities of the hidden and buried realities of the unconscious mind. Lesbianism is a sexuality that comes under the umbrella term, LGBTQ+, which yet needs to be recognised in many ways, even though Section 377, a Victorian law, was eventually struck down by decriminalizing homosexuality. At those times, in the Indian scenario, lesbian influence was contemplated as unnatural and dangerous, but their existence was consistently ignored. Lesbian literature evolved into a distinct field of study, emerging from the shadows of women's writing. Abha Dawesar's iconic novel *Babyji*, which explicitly discussed female sexuality, was indeed a bold move, something that most writers even dare to approach. The present study will focus on the working of the character's psyche concerning sexuality. It is an attempt to find out any traces of a look-like defence mechanism or a kind of resistance which stems from female homosexuality. The novel opens up a space for discussion as the protagonist, a sixteen-year-old adolescent girl, Anamika Sharma, is caught off guard by a rush of desires, feelings, and new emotions towards women. As an Indian lesbian girl who becomes the voice of adulthood, she encounters real-life experiences that challenge the uncertainty of her sense of identity construction. This study further explores how her upbringing and socio-cultural background shape her disposition, resulting in the consequence of her resistance and rebellion.

Keywords– Lesbian, homosexuality, women, adolescence, defence mechanism

Heteronormativity can be explained as,

“a way of being in the world that relies on the belief that heterosexuality is normal, which implicitly positions homosexuality and bisexuality as abnormal and thus inferior.” (Blackburn & Smith, 2010).

Among homosexuals, female homosexuals have been doubly marginalized from mainstream society. Being a woman and a lesbian, their survival in the male supremacist patriarchal society is unimaginable. The existence of lesbians in India was unveiled in 1996, when the controversial movie *Fire* by Deepa Mehta was released. The film faced much backlash from the public and was immediately banned due to its offensive portrayal of the problematic theme.

According to Faderman (1981),

“A lesbian is a woman who makes women prime in her life, who gives her energies and her commitment to other women rather than to men. Some even proclaimed, “All women are lesbians”, by which they meant that potentially all women have the capacity to love themselves and to love other females, first through their mothers and then through adult relationships.”

Such a beautiful sentiment was not acceptable to society then, where lesbian women were labeled as deviant, evil, diseased, and impure.

Abha Dawesar's novel *Babyji*, which received huge critical acclaim, was published in 2005, is one of the foremost adult novels that celebrates the love between women. The story revolves around a sixteen-year-old girl, Anamika Sharma, who was born into a middle-class orthodox family in Delhi. Her parents are educated and working, but stereotypically narrow-minded. This novel unravels the complex workings of Anamika's mind towards her newer experiments and young adulthood experiences. During the metamorphosis of adolescence, she self-discovers her sexuality. She seems entangled in a complex triangular romantic relationship with her classmate, her servant, and a mature woman of her mother's age. Many of her transformations and confusions are a result of her impending adulthood.

It was Sigmund Freud who propounded the Psychoanalytic theory of personality, later based on the studies of her father, Anna Freud developed the categories of defence mechanisms of the ego in her book *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (1936), categorizing and explaining that the defence mechanisms are the measures designed to "secure the ego and save it from experiencing pain or unendurable ideas". "defence mechanisms" were psychological devices used to cope with anxiety (Taylor 2003). Defense mechanisms can be explained as the psychological strategies or certain measures taken by our psyche, consciously or unconsciously, while dealing with something challenging. They can be either a blessing or a curse. Freudian defense mechanisms include repression, denial, projection, displacement, regression, sublimation, rationalization, reaction formation, intellectualization, and undoing. Employing them helps to deal with the stressful experience and to adapt to that particular difficult situation, more like a coping mechanism.

In *Babyji*, the protagonist Anamika Sharma is a brilliant and bold teenage girl who is confused about her sexuality. She maintains a romantic and emotional relationship with three different women in her life. Her knowledge related to sex and sexuality comes from the paradigmatic ancient text of sex and pleasure, *the Kamasutra*.

"I used to be innocent, the Kamasutra that I force-fed myself seemed completely of another world, alien and absurd. After I read it, however, magical things started to happen" (2).

The so-called magical things are her relationships. This paper focuses on the intrinsic elements of the psyche of the character, Anamika, and her lesbian experience.

The study is based on the investigation of how Anamika, the protagonist, employs the defense mechanism of denial and defiance in lesbianism to show her resilience towards the external/patriarchal world. Living in a stereotypical male-dominated society, she constantly feels misfit. She is ambitious, independent, and talented, but everywhere her gender status is measured and not her intellectual abilities. Even in her family, she says,

"I was a slave in my own home, a caged animal, a monkey being forced to perform on the street" (115).

Her family is expecting her to act or behave in a certain way, and her parents are forcing her to attend a social function that she has no interest in attending. Anamika's mother wants her to be more like Sheela, physically. She says, "You should go out less in the sun and eat more, she wants her to be chubbier, and fair like Sheela. (Dawesar, 34). Anamika doesn't normally fit into the fair skin, standard of beautiful Indian women, and not exactly domestically inclined, she has more professional ambitions than fulfilling the role of a fragile woman.

She has a lot of questions and she needs answers,

"how life is to be lived, what's right and wrong, what we should want, whether our morality should be about what we want or what's set down by society" (169).

She is hesitant to embrace the life directed to her, since her moral and social codes contradict. For her,

"I hated the ageism of Delhi and its anti-diluvian norms, when there are categories for everything" (2)

Anamika is a rebel, and she is against all the distinctions made between people, based on age, caste, class, etc. She despises the system because it is so organized and was imposed upon her, trying to control her. After all, she is an opinionated woman. Her rebellious nature questions everything, all the establishments of the belief system. Everyone is trying to make her fit into a pre-designed category or to accept a pre-designed fate or future. She doesn't need it, for the reason that she can create one for herself. The last thing she wants is to live a life adhering to societal expectations.

In all her fantasies about Sheela, Tripta, and Rani, she imagines herself as a man from the movies. Also, she enjoys it whenever she is misunderstood as a boy by someone. Also, she doesn't want a boyfriend either. All these indicate that she enjoys what a man has, doesn't necessarily mean she wants to be a boy. It is about the freedom to live life without any rules and the privileged position a man holds just by being born. To protect herself from the patriarchal society and avoid undesirable feelings of disappointment of not fitting in the framework, she gladly embraces lesbianism. She is also in constant denial, where she can't accept or change what happens around her, and she forgets the existence of that reality. To reduce her anxiety and find comfort, she indulges in romantic friendships and love between women. Anamika's resilient self, consciously or unconsciously, activates her coping mechanism, which acts as a shield to protect her from the external world. Her resistance is a defense mechanism to disobey the rules and restrictions dictated by society. For a woman to be a lesbian in a male world, which is homophobic, is itself an act of resistance, which can be consciously or unconsciously, an unwillingness to adhere to the so-called framework imagined in a male brain. She was trying to safeguard her mental health by using different strategies to challenge an unbearable external reality.

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