

# “Coming Out” of The Baby Dyke in Babyji By Abha Dawesar: An Attempt to Understand Adolescent Lesbianism.

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**Abstract:** *Queer is an all inclusive term for gender and sexual minorities who aren't "straight" in their sexual orientation. This includes lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders, transexuals, cisgenders etc. Literally, the word means "strange" or "peculiar", and therefore came to be used rather derogatorily against those who practiced same-sex desires or relationships in the late 19th century. Around the world, homosexuality is now receiving legitimacy; stigma and discrimination are giving way to equality and inclusion. Nevertheless, the Indian scenario seems to be still in dark even after the decriminalization of Section 377 of the IPC. People are sensitized through media in the form of advertisements, documentaries, novels, books, journals and so on, about the burgeoning 'third gender'. Yet, Homophobia is prevalent among the majority in India with all of its conventional stereotypes and misconceptions. Most natural human existence is termed as unnatural, abnormal, disease stricken yet curable and subjected to conversion therapies. Most adolescents naturally identify themselves as heterosexual, however there is a minority of teenagers among us who are never taken seriously in the matters of sexual importance. Aim of the study is to lay bare the subtle intricacies of the working of a sophisticated adolescent lesbian mind, through the much acclaimed novel Babyji by Abha Dawesar. Published in 2005 and set in 1980s Delhi, it narrates the coming of age, sexual feats and fantasies of a 16 year's old baffled schoolgirl. The paper titled "Coming Out" of the Baby Dyke in Babyji by Abha Dawesar: An attempt to understand Adolescent Lesbianism is an attempt to understand the sexual orientation of the protagonist Anamika Sharma who in her teens is figuring out herself. She is faced with several psychological, philosophical and existential questions in the course of the novel that leads her towards a revelation about her sexual and emotional preferences in a heteronormative, heterosexual world that surrounds her. The study is essentially narrowed down to focus on Adolescent Lesbianism. Theories of sexual orientation in the form of models by Vivienne Cass, Richard R Troiden and Eli Coleman, theory of psychosexual development by Dr Sigmund Freud and theory of existentialism as put forth by Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, would shape the framework for the analysis and interpretation of the character and the novel as a whole. Queerness which is inseparable from the very essence and existence of life of LGBTQ population is spoken about through the study.*

**Keywords:** *Queer, Dyke, Lesbianism, Inversion, Adolescence, Identity formation, Phases of Identity formation, Models of Identity formation, "Coming out", Existentialism, Ethical freedom.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Sexual minorities as if by default have always been epistemologically portrayed as 'the other' to the dominant heterosexuality.

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The assertion remains that homosexuality is subservient to a binary relationship that upholds heterosexuality as the only way of surviving and comprehending the world. The strong taboo against any form of sexuality which is outside the limits of heterosexuality did prevent writers from addressing such issues in the past. Ruth Vanitha, Saleem Kidwai, Manju Kapoor, R Raja Rao, Suniti Namjoshi, Maya Sharma, Vijay Tendulkar, Shobha De and Abha Dawesar are a few Indian English writers who bring out the quiescent realities in the Indian society and presents alternate sexuality that dismantles the heteronormative social or cultural order. Sexual Orientation indicates a person's sexual identity and interest in relation to another sexual or gender identity to which they are attracted; that well explains the fact of being/ feeling heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual. Crucial transition, much queer in nature take place during the formation of sexual orientation and grips those minds that war against a heterosexist society. Not only is there an external fear of being victim of homophobia to battle with but also an internal pressure and aggression often leading to an internalized state of struggle and confusion. There are five major theories regarding sexual orientation and development, which are understood as theoretical models of identity formation. According to Vivienne Cass "identity is acquired through a developmental process" and "stability and change in human behavior are dependent on the congruency or incongruency that exists within an individual's interpersonal environment" (p.220). Richard R Troiden viewed his developmental theory as "taking place against the backdrop of stigma" (p. 47) which he emphasized would develop over time, to include a number of critical transitions that would eventually culminate in self-branding as gay or lesbian. Eli Coleman (1982) noted "that each model offered a new dimension to the understanding of the complexities of sexual developmental process" (p. 470). Lesbianism, aka sapphism or female homosexuality, is the state of intense emotional, sexual, romantic, physical, erotic or spiritual attraction of a human female to another. A Lesbian is a woman who experiences such feelings. Coming out.... is a sensitive process as the need for it, at first takes shape within the lesbian mind only after a self realization. An alien feeling, a feeling of difference from other females of the same age group in matters of disposition, affliction and manners are felt. This unconstrained emotions leading to deviation from the expected normative overwhelms the subject herself. Though there are several genetic and medical explanations to this condition, it can psychologically be traced back to formative years of psychosexual development in the adolescence stage. Adolescence, which marks a transitional stage of physical and psychological development



in human life, generally begins with the onset of puberty, which is from an age of 10 years up to 16 years in girls. It is carried over to adulthood when a complete sexual and emotional maturation is finally achieved. A teenage lesbian identity is potentially fluid to the extent that it is highly receptive not only to its changing sensations and emotions, but also to that of the ones who surround it. Babyji is the story of Anamika Sharma, an outright dyke, who prefers to sneak out of her home at night, on her bike to parade the streets of Delhi unnoticed. At school she is an awe-inspiring student, unbeatable at quantum physics. At home, hiding in the garage she finds gratification in learning the art of sex as put down in the Kamasutra. Within no time, she experiments with knowledge gained and seduces Tripta Adhikari, an older charming divorcee; the family servant Rani, and has caught the attention of Sheela, a classmate coveted by all the boys. Amidst the much happening world of adulthood, Anamika is led to the path of Self-realization. She poses questions that would boggle someone twice her age.

## II. OBJECTIVE

The objective of the paper is

1. To explain the lesbian identity of Anamika Sharma
2. To track and analyze the growth of lesbian identity in Anamika Sharma through models of sexual orientation
3. To trace out the factors that lead to her "Coming out"
4. To explain how Anamika deals with her lesbian identity and existence and survives in the public sphere

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology applied for furnishing the paper involves qualitative reading and analysis of the primary text *Babyji* by Abha Dawesar. The protagonist Anamika Sharma is taken as the subject of psychological study. Firstly, the psychological status of Anamika as budding dyke or newborn lesbian who cannot help being drawn towards partners of the same sex for love; both physically and emotionally is put under lens of psychoanalytic study based on Freud's theory of identity formation, sexual aberration, inversion and orientation in terms of stages of development. Lastly, philosophical theory of existentialism which emphasizes individual freedom is consulted. Freedom of human soul, aspect of "free will" and how it is exercised by the protagonist is carefully studied. The aim is to assess the extent to which Anamika can be branded a lesbian in her process of "Coming Out" and how well she thrives the situation, and finally breaks free.

In his Three Essays on the theory of sexuality, Dr Sigmund Freud discusses about sexual inversion. Sexual inverts are those who anatomically or physically display or identify themselves as male or female but internally feel the opposite. "Inversion", to Freud never implied any sort of "Degeneracy"; neither did he claim that homosexuality can be cured. Freud understood homosexuality as a distinct existence. Nature of sexual inverts as observed by Freud

1. They are certainly inverted; they require their sexual object to be always of the same sex, because the opposite sex can never be an object of arousal or sexual longing. It rather leaves them indifferent or repulsive and may even evoke sexual repugnance.
2. They are unsteadily inverted in the sense that their sexual object may belong unpredictably to either the same or to the

opposite sex. The inversion lacks the character of exclusiveness.

3. They may be intermittently inverted, under certain external conditions, which depends on the inaccessibility of the normal sexual object or a standard object even for imitation. In such a case, they take as the sexual object a person of the same sex and thus find sexual gratification.

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|---------------------|---|
| Identity Confusion  | One begins to wonder "Who am I?" Feels different from peers, personal alienation, the person becomes conscious of the same sex attraction and refuses labeling as such. |
| Identity Comparison | One begins to consider chances of "May be" a homosexual or bisexual, followed by heightened sense of belonging to nowhere, "Am I the only one in the world"             |
| Identity Tolerance  | "I am probably" stage, the person moves out to contact more and more like ones, as a feeling of not belonging to heterosexual world gets strong                         |
| Identity Acceptance | Accepts the identity, trusts and selectively discloses to a significant heterosexual in life  |
| Identity Pride      | Takes pride in one's own self, feels anger, scorn and devalues many of the heterosexual institution like marriage, gender based roles etc                               |
| Identity Synthesis  | Them and Us stage, that some heterosexuals are supportive and can be trusted, those who are not supportive are further devalued   |

4. The Inverted, assert plenty of reason to their distinct behavior, in their judgment about the peculiarities of their sexual impulse. Some take the inversion as a matter of fact very much normal with regard to their comprehension of their own libido, and firmly demand the same rights as the normal. However, there are others who strive against the fact of their inversion and perceive it as morbid

## IV. MODELS OF IDENTITY FORMATION AND STAGES OF THE "COMING OUT" PROCESS

Vivenn Cass states six development stages of the Coming Out process, which includes Troiden's model of homosexual identity is a remodeling of Cass's and much simplified, it involves

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|---------------------|--|
| Sensitization       | Being marginalized and made to feel different from the peers of same sex. Difference in sexuality is not likely to be noticed as a difference, or even felt different. Occurs before puberty   |
| Identity Confusion  | Recognition of feelings and behaviors that could be branded homosexual. Several sexual strategies are used to cope up with like Denial, Avoidance, Repair, Acceptance. Occurs in Adolescence stage, roughly during the age of 18 for females and 17 for males                |
| Identity Assumption | Adoption of identity is exaggerated and, often stereotypic mannerism and behavior is exhibited uninhibited. Confidence develops. Group alignment/immersion with like ones is likely, for females at the age of 21 to 23  |
| Commitment          | Homosexuality completely integrates with the personality, rather than a mere description limited to sexual behavior alone. Complete identification as lesbian or gay or bisexual or even non homosexual individual, thereby an increased sense of understanding with oneself |

Rigidity of each stage of development with regard to stipulated age range, linear nature of the process, side stepping socio-cultural factors that influence identity development, led later researchers and



psychologists like Fassinger, Miller, and McCarn etc. to condense and propose Phases of the “Coming out” process. Awareness Phase, Assessment Phase, and Decision Phase are roughly the three phases of the “Coming Out” process.

## V. ANALYSIS AND MAJOR FINDINGS

The novel is a narration in first person by Anamika Sharma addressed as *Babyji*. It is a usage much common among North Indians, which implies love and subservience to the position of “little mistress” that Anamika the heroine, holds in public and private space. Though a teenager, 16 years’ old studying in 12th standard, she is an unassuming combination of innocence and sensuality. Anamika, as told by herself was ever fed on “clean” things. Her reading of *Kamastura* triggers her understanding of how alienated she was with the actual ‘sins’ of the world; from her Self. Neither in the beginning of the novel nor throughout have we found elaborate concrete description by Anamika of her physical appearance or her active self participating as a partner in sex. Rani in the *Jhuggi* episode, mistakes Anamika for a boy, which Rani later confess. Similarly Jeet, Tripta’s son’s first impression of Anamika is “Are you a Didi or a Bhaiyaa” to which we have Anamika answering to herself, “A Didi who may be really should have been a Bhaiyaa”. She is too conscious to accept the compliment of “beautiful”, though “brilliant” seems to her a word that can do some justice to her character. Egoistical and Narcissistic elements of description though modestly absent critically hints nothing but Anamika’s lower self-esteem and self-confidence. The incomprehensible feeling of being trapped in the wrong body gets hold on her once in a while. Anamika which means “One without a Name” is symbolically much suited name for a lesbian heroine, as she stands representative, to a population who still can’t be well placed in the strata of our society. Anamika’s quest to figure out herself seems to have initialized much before the starting of the novel; her narration. As a teenage girl, Anamika open up her knowledge of the unnamed, the less talked about, forbidden dark side of the metropolitan Delhi. Here everything has homogenized and integrated to the fast paced life of people; people who are not ready to pause and have a look around or empathize with their fellow beings. Anamika in particular is angry with her mother’s plan to dismiss Neetha their current maid servant, who has just started to be Anamika’s favorite. Her night travel is the only one adventure left to her, which binds her close to the city and the people. Anamika’s journey to knowing her latent self, starts roughly at 16 years of age. In one of her night rides, she finds it hard to pull her eyes off a woman squatting, to pee behind the bushes in “*Jhuggis*”. Take it as the after effect of reading *Kamasutra*, consequently and most naturally she identifies and doubts herself to be the “Masculine Doer” in act of sex mentioned in *Kamasutra*.

Then on Anamika starts assessing every woman who catches her eye by their vital statistics. She goes on to assert that everyone should be allowed to have affairs. “I decided, I would avenge myself by holding hands and flirting with girls since Indian society was so holier-than-thou about having boy-friends.” (1) P.11 The first part of the novel begins with Anamika’s confessions on reaching puberty. She feels tremendous changes that are taking place in her mind and body. Her thoughts go like “I was experiencing things that I was sure my friends Vidur, Ashima, Sheela, Preeti,

Deepa, Sonali and Tina had not experienced. In fact, my momentum was such that I was almost certain the class hoodlum, Chakra Dev, who was taller and more physically developed than any of the other boys, was soon going to be left far behind. I was suddenly ahead of everyone, more grown up.” (3) P.15. During one of her biology class on gene coupling and about dominant and recessive gene, she grows thoughtful “Was I attracted to long hair and soft skin because of a gene in my body” Later she herself resolves the puzzle “I had been born with a gene that preferred Sheela’s smoothness to Vidur’s hairiness” The novel deals with the nuances of female promiscuity through the character of Anamika. She now decides to do away with her ‘young and girlie’ outfits and wears boys shirt, jeans, black shoes and generously applies some Old Spice, to pay a visit to Tripta, the divorcee, whom Anamika on her own names “India”. Tripta, herself has an eye on Anamika, the baby dyke, stealthily parading the streets on her bike during nights. At first the visits to India’s remain rather casual and sometimes formal. On a certain fateful night Anamika is drawn to the doorsteps of India’s. Her request to stay there for the night, is welcomed by India, which is followed by a steaming love making session between them “We must have caressed for hours. I felt as if I was living out of my body and outside of time.... Drifting off, I dreamt that India and I were revolving around each other as particles, and then suddenly Transforming into waves, tides, currents.” (4) P.22 A fiercely amorous relation gets fanned up, and it serves as an ice breaker to the dormant Dyke in Anamika. Rani, the new maid servant to the house turns out to be, the woman from the “*Jhuggis*”. Soon Anamika finds Rani approving of her lustful advances towards her. Transcending, their master-servant relationship, Anamika finds in Rani a dotting lady love, a mother, a friend and what not. Anamika now decides to take a chance with Sheela, her classmate, who she find like other boys in the class, bewitching. Sheela being almost of the same age, Anamika has to put in earnest efforts to woo her. Being the Prefect and the most intelligent, influential one at school, under the pretext of uniform inspection, Anamika, goes down hard on Sheela. Anamika notes down “I stood a few feet from her and watched her box-pleated gray skirt fly up and down and her thighs stretch and flex as she counted breathlessly totem.” (7) P.40 At one point in the novel she even forces Sheela to vouch a relationship with her, on the grounds that she (Anamika) has defiled her. “She closed her eyes again, but this time I couldn’t tell if she was enjoying it or not. I pushed with my finger; I wasn’t slow, the way I had been with India and Rani. I was afraid if I was too gentle she would use it to move away. I used all the force, I could muster.” She let out a howl, “Stop it hurts.” I pulled back and said, “I just fucked you”. There was blood on my finger. (36) P.237. Meanwhile in the interval between every affair; eventually three in a row, Anamika is perplexed. She does a self-assessment. . She wonders “Was my current state of multiple affairs something I had constructed for myself or was it Indian style – inevitable and fated? Divorced woman, servant woman, underage woman, I was pursuing them all” (24) P.152. She fears losing her relationships, therefore is equally conscious with each of her consorts. It upset her when India gets worried about their relationship because she, (Anamika) is still a minor in her teens. It

saddens her when Rani says it's not the code of conduct for a servant- master relationship, plus again Anamika is a minor in here too. With Sheela it's all the more tough, because she has fixed attitudes and beliefs about the ideals of society, values and norms in case of marriage, virginity, purity, and God etc. Anamika is aware of the practical basis of every denial she gets, yet decides to remedy it with reformed and new ways of love making with her consorts. She is a jealous lover, and makes every effort to please the ladies so that they don't leave her. At the end of the day Anamika feels justified in her ways and turns a deaf ear to the sermons on heteronormative lifestyle, by her parents. This is because, it is not what 'she' is or 'she' wants. Each time that she plans a visit to India or Sheela, she cleverly cooks up a story. Anamika both as a student and a daughter is highly thought of by everyone, which makes it easier for her to have her way. It's evident from the novel that Anamika is slightly more bonded to her mother than her father who never cares to take out time from his work and social gatherings, for the family. Once in relationship with Rani, Anamika doesn't fail to find a surrogate mother in her. She equates the loving embrace of Rani especially during tough times of anguish and emotional turmoil, as nothing short of motherly; safe and secure. Complementing this "playboy"/Dyke side of her persona is her love for absolute freedom from various strictures laid down by family and society. She wants to break free from her father's authority and rules at home. She imagines "Once I was an adult I could earn a lot of money and do as I pleased. I would flaunt my freedom and my wealth." (14) P.119 Anamika gets into a heated argument with her dad on the issue of Mandal Commission and the consequent Self Immolations that take place. She scorns everything about the heteronormative, patriarchal society, which believes in selling off the daughters in marriage at a prime age; bringing out laws of reservation that deprives the country of skillful people, who migrate to other countries and so on. She lashes out at her father who sees 'self respect' as the reason behind the act of self immolation. She says, "Principles, my foot, they are immature and reckless teenagers. Everyone's doing it out of some kind of herd instinct." (29) P.190. Anamika throughout the novel is tormented with several philosophical and existential questions about life and her personality. She somehow sits for a discussion with her dad, only to counter him, who lectures her on the ways of the world. "How does one know what is good or bad? Is it set down from Nature?" Her thought provoking conversation with India brings her to the western concept of Binary system, and to the fact that Indian sexuality is like a Spectrum. The very thought of spectrum sparks in Anamika, the quest for the Truth. She wants to have it all detailed to her, and asks Vidur to ask his Dad on the same. Vidur does the job, but tries on Anamika's patience. Little does he know that about the phase that Anamika, his friend is passing through. She cries out in indignation and sheer helplessness "How life is to be lived, what's right and wrong, what we should want, whether our mortality should be about what we want or what's set down by society" She is not ready to settle down with anything but Truth, and feels wretched for not knowing it. "The truth about life and about love is the truth about itself. Why couldn't someone who knew everything just sit me down and tell me. Why was it that none knew anything?" (25) P.169 Overcome by guilt, having forced Sheela into an unpleasant act, as well as disillusioned by her Self, Anamika

finally decides to vent out her feelings, the storm raging in her mind ever since she knew things weren't normal with her, to Colonel Adit, her best friend Vidur's father. Though at first he refuses to take her seriously, telling it's just a passing phase, Anamika bluntly puts across to him "I raped a girl today," I said "That's impossible," He said..... We'll talk about it on the way. I am sure it's not as bad as you think," She apparently makes herself clear to Vidur, who in turn wishes her to make Sheela understand his love for her. She gives him a piece of her mind. She tells him "Love is not that sort of thing. It happens between two people, and no power on earth can hinder it or help it." (45) P. 307 Despite the portrayal of Anamika's fiery and passionate lesbian side of character, the author does not shirk away from detailing a very crucial episode with Adit. Adit, the handsome army man is Vidur's father. There builds up instant as though a karmic connection between Anamika and him; at least that's what the protagonist makes us readers feel. His answers for her philosophic questions about life and sexuality bring them closer, and Anamika finds in him her confidant. She is not ashamed to let him know that she is a lesbian. She is not ready to stake her identity through confession in front of anyone except Adit. Now Adit though he wins Anamika's trust, is a pedophile of the nature of Humbert in Lolita. No wonder he gifts Anamika, the distinct girl as he makes her believe, a copy of Lolita. Here it must be noted that writer does not delve deep into the nature of their relationship, yet there is an episode where Adit tightly embraces Anamika. Anamika much contrary to her nature doesn't object to it. Anamika's submissiveness, sweeps her away in surprise. She was not repulsive to Adit's touch, and it felt rather calming. Anamika's difficulty to come into terms with her fluid Self and the society especially after the passing of Bill by the Mandal Commission, perhaps probes Anamika to gather up the courage to stand up for herself and convince her orthodox parents for her further studies in a foreign university With the help of Deepak whom Tripta makes her meet, Anamika finally decides to leave the country and its patriarchal rules and regulation, for America where she gets a grant to pursue her higher studies and career. Though nothing is explicitly suggested about Anamika continuing in her quest for love from same sex relationships, we can assume, as she is free now she will explore all the different facets of life

## VI. CONCLUSION

Teenage is the most experimental and adventurous period of life. It is a period where a person is neither taken for granted as child nor fully acknowledged as an adult. In the Indian context early hints of sexual deviance in a teenage girl is taken lightly and exclusively as a female affair; 'After all it's a female friend' and even very often graciously written off as adolescence 'Growing pains' or just a 'Passing phase' The entire journey of Anamika in *Babyji* by Abha Dawesar is directed towards her "Coming Out" which she does explicitly and implicitly at every situation crucial in her life. The process follows a logical trajectory and moves from Awareness Phase, to Assessment Phase, to Decision Making Phase. The process of "Coming Out" has a philosophical and existential dimension to it. Here the Queer Self is much in conflict with itself. A Queer personality



therefore always goes through a process of synthesis and integration as to find ways to initially adjust, then conform to an extent, and then if not possible, quit the space and find One's Own; and still if the crisis persists then revolt or breach any patriarchal institution that arbitrarily dictates the code for the society. The queer existence therefore can be argued to be foundationally existential. Existentialism as a philosophy has always emphasized individual existence, freedom and choice. It exhorts that humans define their own self; meaning to their existence through rational decisions, in an otherwise irrational universe. Freedom, action, and decision are the fundamentals to rise above the essentially absurd configuration and narrow fixed values of a heteronormative world. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, specifically in the second chapter "The Lesbian" refuted many prejudices against lesbianism. She says "Their sexuality is not determined by anatomical 'destiny'", Beauvoir (2011, 417). She concludes that there is indeed a social "system" that strips women of their sovereignty, and female homosexuality is nothing but an attempt to escape this system (Beauvoir 2011, 419). Again, we find her views on ethical freedom in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, published in 1947, in which she states that we are born into a "serious world", a world of fixed, predisposed values and established authorities. As children we are much happy to stay in its constraints, and we ought to be. Obedience that's demanded doesn't seem to be alienating or stifling, because it is hardly an age to understand the world least one's self. Once the child reaches the age of Adolescence, anxieties of freedom, to be responsible for oneself grips her and him. Some evade this ethical freedom and moral responsibility and brood over the lost phase of innocent childhood. However there are a few who outgrow this to exercise their existential freedom quite seriously, and sound queer in their conviction. They are the ones who refuse to settle down with the set rules and codes of society or, happily hide behind them. According to Beauvoir choosing to remain a child is act of "bad faith", and to treat an adult as a child is also not permissible. Here Beauvoir deviates from Sartre in his individualistic idea of existentialism, and calls upon for a mass involvement to free oneself as well as others. She asserts that acknowledging one's freedom is a necessary, still is not sufficient for an ethical revolution. To provide the freedom an ethical dimension, ties that bind artists and writers, who can be considered embodiments of ethical ideals in many respect, with the readers and among themselves must be strengthened. This act of solidarity would help in manifestation of certain values, projects, conditions into being. The works of writers who take up queer themes, express the subjective passions of highly free spirited protagonists who clearly undermines the basic foundation of readymade values on which our society is built on. They describe the ways in which biological, social, cultural, material and political complexities of our situations can either alienate us from our freedom or open us to it. The choice remains completely One's Own.

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