



GENDER BINARY(IES): **PRAXIS, PROJECTIONS AND REFLECTIONS**

BANGERA RUPINDER KAUR AND DR. NEENA SETH PAJNI

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PREFACE

A key component of human identity is gender that shapes our interactions, perceptions, and experiences. Societies all around the world have used binary frameworks to define their knowledge of gender for ages, dividing people into the two categories of males and females. Literature, society, politics, and other areas of human existence have all been impacted by this binary model. These binary conceptions have been challenged by the changing understanding of gender, which has led to a critical analysis of its ramifications and opened up new avenues for investigation. In this edited book, titled **"Gender Binary(ies): Praxis, Projections, and Reflections,"** we delve into the multifaceted nature of gender binaries and their relevance in diverse contexts, exploring the intersections between gender and literature, society, politics, and more.

For many years, literature has been a potent medium for expressing and considering society norms and values. Literary narratives have been significantly shaped by gender binaries, which frequently reinforce traditional gender norms and expectations. However, the literary world changes along with how society perceives gender. In their exploration of many gender identities and experiences, contemporary authors challenge and defy gender binary thinking. Literature provides a forum for challenging, dismantling, and rebuilding the binary framework while stressing the intricacies and fluidities of gender through a variety of genres and forms. For this edited book, contributors from across the nation have contributed their research papers and articles relevant to the book title, bringing together insightful chapters that analyze the representation of gender binaries in literature, explore alternative narratives, and examine the ways in which literature contributes to the ongoing discourse surrounding gender.

Beyond literature, broader societal processes and gender binaries both influence and are influenced by one another. A binary understanding of gender has frequently been reinforced by society as a whole, leading to rigid expectations, unfairness, and discrimination. However, the variety of human experiences and identities is not adequately

multifaceted nature of gender binaries and their relevance in literature, society, politics, and beyond. This book brings together a diverse range of research papers and articles from contributors across the nation, each offering their unique perspectives and expertise on the topic. The chapters cover a wide array of themes, all centered around the exploration of gender binaries.

Through an examination of gender binaries in literature, this volume uncovers how authors have challenged and subverted traditional gender roles and narratives. It delves into the rich tapestry of literary works that offer alternative perspectives and narratives, reflecting the complexities of gender. By analyzing these literary texts, readers gain a deeper appreciation for the transformative power of storytelling and the potential for literature to shape and challenge societal understandings of gender.

Moving beyond literature, the book explores the societal implications of gender binaries, shedding light on how binary constructs shape social norms, expectations, and inequalities. The contributors investigate the experiences of individuals who exist beyond the binary, highlighting the challenges they face in a society that often fails to recognize and accommodate their identities. Additionally, the book critically examines the roles played by institutions, policies, and cultural practices in perpetuating or challenging gender binaries, paving the way for a more inclusive and just society.

In summary, "Gender Binary(ies): Praxis, Projections, and Reflections" is an edited book that examines the multifaceted nature of gender binaries and their relevance in literature, society, politics, and beyond. With contributions from a diverse group of experts and scholars, this book offers a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in the construction and deconstruction of gender binaries. By questioning prevailing norms, reflecting on alternative narratives, and envisioning inclusive futures, this book seeks to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding gender, encouraging readers to challenge binary frameworks and embrace the richness and diversity of human experiences and identities.

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CHAPTER

A STUDY OF LESBIANISM AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY IN ABHA DAWESAR'S BABYJI

Dr. Tabassum M. Inamdar ¹

Abstract:

The depiction of lesbianism and emergence of sexual diversity has been portrayed by Abha Dawesar in her second novel Babyji which published in 2005. Anamika Sharma, an HSC science student, is the protagonist of the novel. She has a lesbian relationship with a widow who lives near her house, Rani, a housewife who comes to her house for chores, and Sheila, her classmate. Apart from these three, she also takes an interest in Chakra Dev and does not object when Vidur's father tries to touch her wildly. As a result, she became completely bold, tolerant and rebellious in nature. Thus, the current study intends to investigate the intricate system of sexual politics that persistently seeks to confine the lesbian and influence behavioral patterns.

Keywords: *Lesbian Identity, Sexual Diversity and Sexual Politics.*

Introduction:

Abha Dawesar graduated with honours from Harvard University and was born in New Delhi, India, in 1974. She now resides in New York. She has won multiple awards, including the *Lambda Literary Award* and the *Stonewall Book Award* from the American Library Association. "India's leading weekly magazine India Today named Dawesar as one of the twenty-five path-breaking Indians in 2007 and she was named one of India's 12 remarkable women by Femina magazine." (<https://www.wheelercentre.com/people/abha-dawesar/>) There are four novels on her credit which received globally fame. *Babyji*, her best-known book, got the *Stonewall Award* from the American

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Library Association. This is a first- person-narrated novel i.e. by Anamika Sharma herself. The protagonist of the novel is the center of attention, who serves as a case study on female promiscuity in the novel. The 'News-week' summed-up the character sketch of Anamika's personality:

Anamika Sharma is the kind of girl you always hated. She gets perfect grades and as Head Perfect of her school in Delhi, has vast authority over her class- mates. But Anamika's extra-curricular activities are far from exemplary...Anamika's amorous indiscretions provide a colorful backdrop to her questions about morality, gender roles and social rank in modern India, resulting in a tantalizing and sophisticated coming-of-age story. (Dawesar, Cover Page: Back)

Lesbianism: An Interpretation:

Many Indian women writers of the postmodern era are now interested in including lesbian relationships in their work. Many of them have already created outstanding lesbian writing throughout the years, continuing to raise awareness of the problem of inequality in love through their gripping tales. However, this does not imply that lesbianism is a contemporary invention in Indian literature as many believes, accusing it of being an import from the west. Since its inception, lesbianism has played a significant role in society.

A Study of Lesbianism and Sexual Diversity in Abha Dawesar's *Babyji*:

The novel *Babyji* begins with the wonderful description of Delhi as: "Delhi is a city where things happen undercover...A city with no romance but a lot of passion. You ask how passion without romance is possible. (Ibid, p. 3) The narrator, further, tells her reading habits and sexual diversity: from innocence to experience:

My knowledge of the facts of life was based entirely on books, and clean ones at that. I read nineteenth-century classics by George Eliot and Emily Bronte. These books never went into any details. To remedy this I decided to read the *Kamasutra*. 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. (Ibid)

The central character of the novel is Anamika Sharma. An educated, elderly divorcee (Tripta Adhikari) and a lower caste maid

(Rani) are involved in a love triangle that revolves around her. She also begins to flirt openly with the popular girl at school (Sheela), the father of her closest friend (Adit), and the bad lad from the neighborhood (Chakra Dev). Anamika questions whether she should pursue postsecondary study abroad towards the novel's conclusion. As a result, the novel concludes hopeful but not pleasantly.

Young and hopeful Anamika Sharma is conscious of her privilege in Indian society. She had three secret lesbian relationships throughout the course of the novel, two with older women and one with a close friend. All three relationships are with people of the same sex. The first of these three lesbian relationships is with divorced elderly woman Tripta Adhikari. When Tripta visits Anamika's school to request a spot for her 5-year-old kid, Anamika meets with her. In particular, 'I met a woman. We first met in my school. She had come to attend the parent-teacher meeting. I was the Head Prefect.' (Ibid) Tripta, whom Anamika refers to as 'India', is a woman who is twice as old as her mother. The majority of Anamika's time is spent with 'India'. Anamika described an incident of night where she enjoyed ecstatic moment of life,

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 Trans forming into waves, tides, currents. (Ibid, P.22)

There are times when Anamika sneaks out of the house after her parents have gone to bed to spend the night with her new boyfriend, India (Tripta Adhikari), an affluent academic woman who lives next door. Tripta confesses her love for Anamika while the two were travelling to Kasauli: "You have to believe me. You and I are in love, she declared. (Ibid, p. 258) Mr. and Mrs. Sharma are aware of Tripta Adhikari, but they naturally believe that she is a mother figure to their child, despite the fact that Tripta is fully aware that what she is doing constitutes statutory rape. Even better, Anamika's parents permitted her to travel to Kasauli for a brief getaway with Tripta and two of her friends. They are very social people who talk about societal topics outside of their lesbian relationships. In the end, Anamika and India agreed to keep dating while not taking it too seriously.

Her second lesbian relation is with Rani, a maid servant. Rani is illiterate, she knows only Hindi language. An alcoholic husband daily beat her; it was routine life for Rani. The Anamika saves the

young 23-year-old Rani from a jhuggi. Rani is told to sleep on the floor of Anamika's room because their flat does not have a servant's bedroom. Despite the servant's sporadic hesitant pleas that Babyji, for her own good, should seek the love of a lad her own age, this, of course, gives the girl plenty of opportunities to explore submissive Rani's exquisite body.

Rani was quiet. The silence frightened me. I unhooked the front of her blouse. "No, Babyji," she said.

Restricted access to Rani was unacceptable.

"What's the matter?" I said.

"It's wrong. You should marry a boy like Vidur baba. You have your life ahead of you. I'm unlucky to have a brute for a husband," she said." (Ibid, p.200)

However, despite the risk of social shame associated with associating with someone from a far lower caste, Anamika sticks to her decision, rejects the man's attempts, and is even willing to teach Rani some English.

While Anamika's love affair with India and Rani was developing, she started her third lesbian journey with Sheela. Sheela was incredibly attractive, smart, and well-liked by the schoolboys. Once, Anamika informed her that she had lovely lips and she would like to kiss them because she was charmed by her beauty and had lately experienced fire. She said it once more and meant it this time. Sheela didn't say anything, but later, when Anamika was spending time with her mother, Sheela called and asked what she meant when she said she wanted to kiss her. She responded that she was only kidding, realizing her mother was watching. However, when Anamika met Sheela next day at school, the subject of kissing came up once more. Sheela asked her, and she responded that she did not consider kissing to be sinful or immoral. Anamika, acting as Head Perfect at the assembly, approached Sheela to inspect her uniform and discovered a problem with the skirt. Sheela stepped out of line and anticipated punishment. Sheela begged you not to urge her to run because the boys would stare at her high skirt. Following that, Anamika asked if she could kiss her. Sheela informed her that she had not yet been kissed. Anamika desired more antics and fun with her. She informed Sheela that the uniform inspection was still ongoing and that she needed to examine the skirt's bloomers. According to the school law, girls were required to wear white bloomers rather than plain pants. Sheela was wearing blue pants,

which Anamika discovered when she lowered the skirt. She also saw that Sheela's legs were waxed; Sheela had been forced to perform *Uthak-Bethaks* as a form of punishment. Anamika described: 'I stood a few feet in front of her and watched her box-pleated gray skirt fly up and down and her thighs stretch and flex as she counted breathlessly *toten*.' (Ibid, p.40) Thus, only because of this incident their lesbian journey has started. After that, she took many opportunities to have a look at Sheela or talk on love, sex and other harsh issues.

Apart from lesbian relation, the novel addresses certain other social issues. One of these is husbands assaulting their wives. Tripta Adhikari, who also divorced her husband due to beating her, was also beaten by her husband, as Rani had previously revealed to Anamika. Tripta informs Anamika's mother about Rani being beaten by her husband, mentioning all types of men, from working class to Tripta's upper class spouse: 'All men are alike. Mine was super-educated. He went to Doon School and St. Stephen's and he still beat me. I left him.' (Ibid, p.66) Sex education episode is a major theme discussed in this novel. In the lecture of Sex Education and HIV, a school girl boldly questioned, why having sex before being married is wrong? From a medical standpoint, the doctor responded, having sex before being married was not harmful, but society did not accept it. Whether or not males who have sex with other men are more likely to have AIDS was Anamika's query. She then inquired as to how two men have intercourse. The doctor said that since sex was biologically intended for procreation and sperm and egg cannot mix to produce a living cell, it was not natural for males to have sex with one another. If two ladies can have sex was Anamika's other question. In agreement, the doctor stressed that it would not involve penetrating heterosexual sex. The doctor answered that it would not involve penetrating heterosexual sex. They also inquired about anal intercourse, Hijaras' homosexuality, and masturbation. In this way the sex education session was over.

The novel is about Anamika's mental and emotional suffering as she approaches puberty or adolescence. Although Anamika is the main character in the novel, it may be interpreted as a generic statement about all people who experience puberty. Chakra Dev serves as Anamika's literary equivalent. Chakra Dev is a male promiscuous, while Anamika is a female. The cultural and familial taboos prevent Anamika from enjoying her desire of freedom by