

Rethinking Gender: A Shift in Contemporary Society

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Abstract

The concept of gender has changed drastically over time. Earlier, it was thought to be wholly a biological construct determined by anatomical variations. However, over the past decade, there has been a profound paradigm shift from viewing gender strictly as a social construct to understanding it as an identity that is deeply inbuilt through societal norms into a child from their earliest development. This evolving academic understanding highlights the tension between biological instincts and the biopolitical matrices enforced by societal expectations. As a result, contemporary literature has increasingly become an active site for challenging these rigid, predefined frameworks. This paper examines the novel Babyji (2005) by Abha Dawesar, which follows the sexual and intellectual awakening of Anamika Sharma, a sixteen-year-old Brahmin schoolgirl in Delhi. Anamika is raised within a traditional family, her romantic and erotic experiences with women directly challenge the heterosexual norms present in Indian society. Through an examination of her unconventional relationships, this paper explores how Anamika rejects the rules set for her to fit into the society's box of a "good girl". By analysing her journey through theories of scholars like Adrienne Rich's "compulsory heterosexuality," Judith Butler's "Gender Performativity", and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's "Queer Fluidity", the paper studies how a teenage lesbian girl successfully challenges patriarchal sexual orders and makes a distinct space for self-defined desire.

Keywords: Lesbianism, Sexuality, Behaviour, Heterosexuality



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Introduction

The novel *Babyji* by Abha Dawesar, though considered to be a lesbian novel focusing on the character Anamika, does not portray her as a traditional lesbian character. The novel portrays her as one who questions society and its unrealistic rules. She is well aware of her sexuality and does not find it unusual. She is portrayed as a Brahmin teenager, the school's head prefect. It is very interesting to note that she is not merely interested in sexual aspects but also tries to understand complex human sexual behaviour and how social constraints work-be it the slum women's squatting, Sheela's "utthak-baithak," or Chakra Dev's private moment with himself.

In all of these cases, there is an acute subversion of the non-consenting ideologies that are spread around society and promote the image of normalcy. When questioned, Anamika replies with a sharp answer: "I have to know the truth. Truth is everything." (Dawesar 169). By truth, she means the truth about "life," "love," and "sexuality".

The Disciplined Body and the Web of Repression

The concept of gender has changed drastically over a period of time. Earlier, it was thought to be wholly a biological construct. Over the past decade, there has been a paradigm shift from viewing gender as a social construct to viewing it as something that is inbuilt through the societal norms into a child. This paper delves into the novel *Babyji* by Abha Dawesar, which takes us through the lesbian character *Babyji*, or Anamika, her teenage upbringing in a Brahmin family, and the societal rules she must follow to fit into society's box of a good girl. The novel talks about a lesbian teenage girl, Anamika, and how she is neglecting all the rules set for her by

society. She is determined to find and explore her own path. This paper will also examine how Anamika is already questioning and is well aware of the construct. The paper will also explore how she is forced to conform to several norms constructed by society for a teenage girl, and how she rejects them. The paper will examine how a teenage lesbian girl challenges the societal rules imposed on her by those around her.

In *Babyji* (2005), Abha Dawesar follows the sexual and intellectual awakening of Anamika Sharma, a sixteen-year-old schoolgirl in Delhi, whose romantic and erotic experiences with women directly confront the heterosexual ideals embedded in Indian society. Through these relationships, Anamika destabilises the rigid norms of gender and sexuality, creating space for self-defined desire. This paper examines how Anamika's experiences can be read through Adrienne Rich's concept of "compulsory heterosexuality" and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's notion of queer fluidity, highlighting the novel's critique of patriarchal sexual order.

The novel *Babyji* by Abha Dawesar, though considered a Lesbian novel focusing on the character Anamika, a lesbian teenager, does not portray her as a traditional lesbian. The novel portrays her as the one who questions society and its unrealistic nature. She is well aware of her sexuality and does not find it unusual. She is shown as a Brahmin teenager who is the head prefect of her school. It is very interesting to note that she is not merely interested in sexual aspects but also tries to understand the complex human sexual behaviour and how the social constraints work, be it the slum women's squatting, Sheela's "utthak- baithak" or Chakra Dev's private moment with himself. In all of these cases, there is an acute subversion of non-consenting ideologies that spreads across

society and promotes the image of normalcy. When questioned, Anamika replies with a sharp answer: "I have to know the truth. Truth is everything." (Dawesar 169). Truth, she means the truth about "life", "love", and "sexuality".

Throughout the novel, there is a focus on the non- heterosexual portrayal of desire, which continuously shifts between the aspects of innate or intrinsic gender identity, as stated by Butler in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997). The body is both the effect and instrument of power. The discourse of the body is entirely related to the discourse of sexuality, which plays an important role in determining which aspect of sexual identity will be dominated and which will not. In "Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison" (1975), Foucault explains the way in which disciplined practices make the internal forces of the body work. Thus, the body, which is the hub of sexual activities, is also rooted in disciplined practices. Foucault explains that the "body is also directly involved in the political field" (Foucault 25) and how it "becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body." (Foucault 26). In the novel, the sexual body has to be dominated by the operative power of the discourse of normative sexuality.

The so-called stability of heterosexuality, thus, maintains control over the lesbian body, thereby making the true natural biological instinct of the body concealed and subcutaneous. This is seen when Anamika regrets, "We are just bound by so many constraints". (Dawesar 347) Initially, the fear of exposure makes her submit to society. She decides to leave and wants to move abroad. She is unable to disclose her love interests to her parents. This is explained in what Foucault's *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978-1979* (1979) explains how life cannot be just understood in biological aspects only, but rather

we have to notice the biological determinants as rooted in political processes.

Reclaiming Freedom: Escaping Compulsory Heterosexuality

"The Lesbian", a chapter in *The Second Sex* (1949) by Simone de Beauvoir, discusses many prejudices against lesbianism. She holds that anatomy can never be 'destiny'. She critiques the social system that restricts women from exercising their freedom and can break away from the so-called compulsory heterosexuality. It shows how female homosexuality acts as an instrument to escape this system.

Nivedita Menon in her *How Natural is Normal? Feminism and Compulsory Heterosexuality* (2005) also states how the proclamation of compulsory heterosexuality can be problematic to other alternative sexualities that are not binary by nature and are marginalised. Thus, we can observe how sexual politics is rooted in the world of fixed binaries and predisposed values and norms. This is also mentioned in Butler's *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947), which she terms as "serious world". Anamika also very explicitly highlights how social norms suppress her sexuality, but she was not at all the one to be suppressed; she sharply feels that, "I want to be free. I don't want society telling me what to do all the time." (Dawesar 338). There is a constant oscillation between repression and resistance, and that is how the queer identity makes its place felt in the dominant discourse of heterosexuality, which tries to ascribe the idea of "mysterious physiology" onto homosexual bodies, as claimed by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* (1976).

Thus, this debate between repression and resistance leads to the understanding of an alternative sexuality and the restrictions on exercising this sexuality.

Queering Domesticity, Performance, and Kinship

The body, therefore, is trapped between the web of biological instincts and biopolitical matrices.

Anamika, on the other hand, breaks away from these norms, the societal norms constructed for a female and for a female's sexuality. She breaks away from the gender roles that are set for a female by society. This is seen in her speech, where she imagines her future as:

I could easily imagine coming home from work and Sheela opening the door to welcome me. I could also imagine having a little son like Jeet walking from room to room, picking up objects and asking questions. I would earn a lot of money, and Sheela would take care of the house. She would press my feet when I got home. I would be working on a top-secret nuclear physics project. I'd have girls after me, but I would be devoted to Sheela, who would be a perfect wife. (Dawesar 119)

Thus, this shows how Anamika is far beyond the gender roles ascribed by society to a female. She breaks away from these norms. By breaking away from these roles primarily, she is simultaneously breaking away from the heterosexual construct of performative acts set for the female and also for a lesbian female. Judith Butler argues it in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) as gender is not a fixed, inherent identity, but a performance constructed through repeated social actions and cultural norms.

Anamika Sharma is an unconventional lover with equally unusual relationships, ranging from a divorcee lady to a maid servant and a girl of her age, Rani. This becomes a very potent instrument to cast a threat to the so-called notion of heterosexuality. Eve Sedgwick, in her writing *Tendencies* (1993), states that "Queer refers to

an open mesh of possibilities... excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender and sexuality aren't monolithically" (Sedgwick 8), which is clearly seen through Anamika's sexuality and relationships. The fluidity integral to queer discourse is observed in her behaviour.

For Anamika, sexual exploration is intertwined with intellectual curiosity. She openly seeks to understand her own sexuality, even turning to the *Kamasutra* for knowledge absent in the society: "I used to be innocent...My knowledge of the facts of life was based entirely on... books... These books never went into any details ... To remedy this, I decided to read *Kamasutra*." (Dawesar1) Anamika rejects the silence that is imposed on women's sexual awareness, aligning with feminist thought of reclaiming the erotic as a site of empowerment. The conflict thus lies not merely between what she is allowed to read and what not, but more importantly, in what she desires to read and what lies beyond her desired reading. This is where the role of *Kamasutra* comes into play as it acts as a path of understanding her desires, her desire to know the truth and the unknown and the different functioning of her body and how her body feels for other bodies.

The Lesbian Continuum and Generational Desires

Adrienne Rich's essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality" and "Lesbian Existence" describes heterosexuality not as a personal act but as a political structure designed to preserve the male dominance in the society. Within this framework, the "lesbian continuum" includes a range of women-to-women bonds, both sexual and emotional, that challenge the patriarchal society. Anamika's connections with other

women, rooted in intimacy, trust and mutual exploration, embody this continuum, subverting the expectation of compulsory attraction to men. While dismantling the normative discourse of "age", she also questions the arbitrary nature of social relations. She feels very oppressed and stands clear on her attraction to older women like Tripta and Rani. Her first encounter with her first love, Tripta, a divorcee, clearly states, "I was susceptible at that age. I had been reading *The Citadel* by AJ Cronin, in which the main female character was described as particularly handsome. I fancied for a moment that she was that handsome woman." (Dawesar 2). She continues: "...I felt my heart overflow with some kind of knowledge I could not immediately identify... that a great discovery had just been made... I wished a sample object like an apple had been involved, something tangible that I could contemplate and hold, smell and bite" (Dawesar 3). Thus, the realisation of her body comes up as a kind of physical and sexual longing, for the desire to hold, smell and bite. What happens, therefore, is the realisation of her longing for a person of her own sex.

She also, while describing her mother, states that,

I visualised them minus their small, tight blouses. For example, the most obvious question to ask when you unbutton an Indian woman's blouse is whether she waxes her underarms... like what sort of bra she is wearing... I unbuttoned her blouse several times in my head and tried to imagine the two scenarios- waxed or not. (Dawesar5).

Anamika, as a young teenager, negotiates the tension between her intimate fantasies. Anamika, a Brahmin by birth, refuses to let her caste or social norms dictate her amorous

pursuits. Her declaration – "Only feelings counted. And sensations." (Dawesar 19) underscores the primacy of emotional and physical fulfilment over social propriety. This unapologetic acknowledgement of female sexual agency parallels the themes in Srimoyee Piu Kundu's feminist erotic novel *Sita's Curse* (2014), which celebrates women's right to articulate, explore, and act upon their desires.

Babyji validates the idea that female desire is not only natural but also formative in the process of self-discovery. Recognising and directing one's attraction, whether towards men or women, becomes an essential act of autonomy.

Intersectionality: Transgressing Boundaries of Caste and Class

Anamika's is well aware of the social conventions that surrounds her. Rather than suppressing her desire to conform to heteronormative expectations, she actively seeks to balance the personal and the sexual. Her romantic relationship diverse from generations to class and castes, suggesting that physical attraction and desire are fluid in nature and not restricted to the boundaries of class, caste and gender. Dawesar's portrays the body not as a site of restriction or something that can be forced into boundaries, but as something that is fluid in nature and can exist outside the social hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality. She states, "I was suddenly ahead of everyone. More grown up." (Dawesar 15), situating sexual knowledge as a rite of passage during puberty. Rather than framing bodily understanding as something that is taboo, Dawesar presents it as instinctual and exploratory, as stated by Michael Foucault, that sexuality is deeply connected with identity formation and power dynamics. That is how the novel challenges conventional heteronormative

narratives and advances the idea of queer selfhood in the Indian socio-cultural context.

Gender Reversals and Protective Agency

Anamika, as a lover, is very protective towards her lovers and shows a very masculine approach in taking care of them. The novel portrays the body as something that needs to be celebrated as well as to be protected. There are multiple scenes in the novel where she is very manly enough to protect her lovers from the outside world. Though a girl herself, she was more concerned for Sheela's safety during their ride home on a DTC bus. After they safely came out of the bus, her first thought was to,

"When the bus reached the next stop, I tugged her husband and pulled her off." While on the way to Tripta's or India's house on a hot afternoon, she feels tired due to the heat, but then she remarks, "I remembered India's face in full detail as I neared her house. Thinking of her, I felt very strong, as I could move mountains for her, lie on train tracks, leap in front of moving trucks to save her life." She is equally protective of Rani when there is a possibility of Rani going back to her husband. We also see her saying, "Rani's touching my feet was a gift of love. A gift so enormous I didn't know what to do. It was also a responsibility." (Dawesar 93) Hence, Anamika is seen as passive as a lover and masculine in her approach because she feels they are only hers.

Resistance to Male Advance and Marital Intimacy

Anamika, in the novel *Babyji*, reflects her consciousness of moving away from the heteronormative standards imposed by society on her. Her interactions and reactions with male characters such as Ajit and Chakra Dev depict a constant tension between societal expectations

and personal desires. Both of them try to approach Anamika with physical interests, yet she continuously rejects their advances. By refusing to agree to their intentions, she shows her autonomy and expresses her preference for relationships with women. Her rejection of heterosexual relationships is further seen when she openly remarks, "I had never wanted a boyfriend anyway." (Dawesar 11) This statement not only shows her disinterest in men but also states her determination to preserve and validate same-sex relationships in a patriarchal society.

At the same time, the novel presents the body as a site of negotiation between power, intimacy and desire. Anamika often positions herself in opposition to male intrusion, attempting to safeguard her female partners from unwanted male attention. This is illustrated in her conversation with Rani, where she interrogates the nature of Rani's marital intimacy: "... "Does he do that sort of thing to you?" she sharply asks. To this, Rani replies, "Sometimes" When further pressed about frequency, Rani admits, "No, some nights", and finally concedes that she does not enjoy it at all (Dawesar 47). Such dialogues emphasise the contrast between coerced heterosexual intimacy and Anamika's pursuit of a genuine same sex connection.

Moreover, Anamika's interest towards the body is beyond physical. Many a times, her curiosity is seen in a very voyeuristic manner, suggesting that her level of intimacy is layered and complex. By placing her desire outside the boundaries of heterosexuality, Anamika not only challenges patriarchal definitions of love and sexuality but also redefines the possibilities of queer female agency in contemporary Indian society.

Abha Dawesar's *Babyji* positions Anamika as a radical subject who actively subverts the heterosexual norms underpinning Indian society. Her exploration of desire, intimacy and identity does not concern the prescriptive path of compulsory heterosexuality, which Adrienne Rich famously defined as a system that enforces women's attraction to men as natural and inevitable (Rich 1980). By engaging in same sex relationships with women across different social and generational lines- Rani, Sheela and Tripta, Anamika resists this coercive framework and insists on the legitimacy of her queer desires. These relationships shows how sexuality is not rigid but fluid, complex and resistant to cultural regulation as stated by Judith Butler's (1990) argument that gender and desire are produced rather than inborn.

Anamika's rebellion is not just a private act but a broader resistance and struggle against how society represses female sexuality. In an India where lesbians are often neglected and silenced, her bold proclamation of her relationship is significant to note. Scholars such as Ruth Vanita (2002) points out how same sex love has historically existed in South Asian society but has been erased because of colonial mindset and rules imposed by the Britishers. Anamika's unapologetic queerness becomes a form of rebellion, which Gayle Rubin (1984) describes as a struggle against the society that privilege and force compulsory heterosexuality.

Anamika's resistance to accept social restrictions shows that heteronormativity itself is a cultural construct. It is maintained through power. Her resistance underscores Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (1990) statement that sexuality is central to identity formation and cannot be just seen in binaries. By creating a space for lesbian desire, Dawesar foregrounds the possibility of multiple identities that do not

conform to societal expectations. Ultimately, *Babyji* defines how personal acts of rebellion are often similar to political resistance. Anamika's refusal to accept the heterosexual expectations shows a greater struggle that narrows down human possibilities. Her character shows how literature can create new imaginaries of being. By going against heteronormativity and embracing queer identity, Anamika not only retrieves her own agency but also symbolises the possibility for social change.

Comparative Analysis: Indian and Global Queer Narratives

Dawesar's *Babyji* does not exist in private but it belongs to a larger archive of queerness that includes the queer desires against heteronormative society. By positioning Anamika with characters from Indian and global queer texts, it shows how Dawesar challenges larger aspects of sexuality.

In the Indian context, Amruta Patil's *Kari* (2008) shows a queer woman manoeuvring urban alienation after a failed same-sex relationship. Unlike Anamika, who is bold in her desires—"I had never wanted a boyfriend anyway" (*Babyji* 11)—Kari is hesitant, in doubt, and melancholic. The difference between their voices shows the variety of queer people in India: where Kari hides herself in the shadows of Bombay's rain-soaked streets, Anamika is bold in her position of same-sex love. Dawesar thereby pushes against the stereotype of queer women as someone being victimised to someone who is unapologetic for it.

This is also seen in an earlier lineage of queer Indian literature, such as Ismat Chughtai's *Lihaaf* (1942), where female intimacy was veiled in metaphor. Begum Jaan's relationship with her maid was veiled in silence, couched in

quilt imagery to circumvent censorship. In contrast, Anamika directly states her longing: "Only feelings counted and sensations" (Babyji 19). Where *Lihaaf* had to whisper desire, *Babyji* declares it aloud. This signals a growing visibility of lesbian voices in Indian writing.

Globally, Dawesar's text resonates with Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006), a graphic memoir where Bechdel charts her lesbian identity alongside her father's closeted homosexuality. Bechdel reflects: "I'd been upstaged, demoted from protagonist in my own drama to comic relief in my parents' tragedy" (Fun Home 58). Similarly, Anamika often resists being sidelined by her family's expectations of a "good Brahmin girl." Unlike Bechdel, who is entangled in secrecy and generational trauma, Anamika actively insists on her autonomy, imagining futures with Sheela and Rani despite the cultural taboos.

Anamika's boldness is also seen when Audre Lorde celebrates of the erotic as power in *Uses of the Erotic* (1984). Lorde states that the erotic is "a source of knowledge and power" (Lorde 57). Anamika's urge to read the *Kamasutra*—"To remedy this, I decided to read *Kamasutra*" (Babyji 1)—shows this principle. She portrays desire not as shame but as an intellectual inquiry, converting sexuality into a site of knowledge production. In this way, Dawesar's novel connects Indian queer writing with a global feminist work that treats women's desire as liberatory rather than abnormal.

Hence, comparative readings reveal how *Babyji* transforms queer literary traditions. While earlier texts like *Lihaaf* hide desires, and later works like *Kari* often struggle with invisibility, Dawesar describes a protagonist who has a lesbian identity unapologetically. When situated against Bechdel or Lorde, Anamika emerges as part of a global queer texts

that insists on the validity of women's love for women as both intimate and political rather than deviant.

Secrecy, Survival, and the Epistemology of the Closet

Anamika's boldness and resistance to heteronormative society, *Babyji* is also well aware of the dangers of exposure and secrecy. Her rebellion is present within a society that demands silence from lesbians. "We are just bound by so many constraints," she admits (Babyji 347), acknowledging the weight of societal repression and expectations.

In India, the female same-sex desire has is often silenced. Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai, in "Same-Sex Love in India" (2000), asserts that colonial laws has erased traditions of women's intimacy and sex desires. Anamika's boldness is radical, but she also recognises the necessity of keeping her relationships secret. Her relationships with Sheela and Rani are conducted behind closed doors, in hidden moments of intimacy that reflect both passion and risk of being caught.

This tension between secrecy and disclosure is also stated by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in "Epistemology of the Closet" (1990), where queerness exists between visibility and invisibility. Anamika openly admits to herself, "I had never wanted a boyfriend anyway" (Babyji 11), yet she cannot openly reveal her love to her family. The closet, thus, becomes both protection and prison.

Resistance, however, lies in how Anamika negotiates this silence. Rather than being silenced entirely, she reclaims her agency in imagination and desire. Her fantasy of a domestic life with Sheela—"I would earn a lot of money, and Sheela would take care of the

house" (Babyji 119)—functions as a radical reimagining of home and kinship. Even within secrecy, she constructs alternative futures that resist heteronormative scripts.

Gayatri Gopinath, in "Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures" (2005), argues that queer female desires often seen through fragments, silences, and unofficial spaces. Anamika has this dynamic: though her society enforces silence, her inner life and relationships are bold and unapologetic. She resists and, by doing so, she portrays queer futures in imagination, intimacy, and intellectual pursuit.

Thus, Babyji portrays queerness within a frame of silence and resistance. The novel does not represent liberality as complete visibility but as a negotiation between secrecy and survival. Anamika though bold in her approach knows the danger of getting caught. Anamika's voice—sometimes loud, sometimes quiet—reveals how queer women in India carve spaces of autonomy even in the face of cultural repression.

Anamika's imagined life with Sheela and a child shows a queer vision of domesticity that challenges the heterosexual family unit. She imagines: "I could easily imagine coming home from work and Sheela opening the door to welcome me. I could also imagine having a little son like Jeet walking from room to room, picking up objects and asking questions. I would earn a lot of money, and Sheela would take care of the house" (Babyji 119). This imagined future life with Sheela resists the dominant model of kinship, which in Indian society is arranged heterosexual marriage, caste purity, and patrilineal descent. Judith Butler in "Undoing Gender" (2004) states that "the norms governing kinship are historically contingent

and politically regulated" (Butler 102). Anamika's future vision displaces these norms by imagining an alternative queer life with Sheela.

Kath Weston's "Families We Choose" (1991) argues that queer communities often build their own family formed from care and chosen bonds. Anamika's future with Sheela resonates with this idea of chosen family, rather than something that is expected. She takes the role of breadwinner, while Sheela becomes a homemaker, also further dismantling heteronormative binaries.

Through these fantasies and imagined futures, Anamika queers the future itself.

Historical Context and Socio-Legal Frameworks

The queer politics in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have emphasised the demand for visibility, recognition, and rights. The Stonewall Riots of 1969 in New York ignited a global movement for gay liberation, premised on the idea that "coming out" was both a personal and political act. In contrast, *Babyji* shows a world where coming out as a lesbian in a patriarchal society is not just difficult but likely dangerous. Anamika's homosexuality has to remain partly invisible to ensure her survival, what Gayatri Gopinath calls the "Impossible Desires" of queer South Asian women (Impossible Desires 2005). Gopinath explains that queerness in South Asia cannot be seen directly with Western models instead it is fragmentary in nature, hidden, and unofficially formed. Anamika's secret encounters with Sheela and Rani aptly reflect this dynamic: resistance that blooms in the shadows rather than under the spotlight.

At the same time, the novel *Babyji* also shows how Indian queer politics intersects with global feminist thought. Adrienne Rich's theory of "compulsory heterosexuality" (1980) is commonly seen in the novel. Rich sees heterosexuality not as "natural" but as a phenomenon that enforces women's dependency on men. Anamika's consistent refusal of the male advances, her remark that "Only feelings counted. And sensations" (*Babyji* 19), is an open rejection of this compulsory framework. Similarly, Judith Butler's assertion in *Gender Trouble* (1990) that gender is performative resonates with Anamika's thought of role reversals when she imagines herself as the breadwinner and Sheela as the homemaker (*Babyji* 119); she rejects the gender binary in ways that reflect Butler's portrayal of heteronormative performance.

Moreover, Anamika's sexuality goes beyond the cultural borders, connecting her to global queer communities. Her intellectual curiosity of reading the *Kamasutra*, as the conventional school education refused to discuss sex (*Babyji* 1), connects to Audre Lorde's insistence that knowledge of the erotic is a source of empowerment (*Uses of the Erotic*, 1984). By seeking knowledge about her desires, Anamika links herself to a global feminist thought of reclaiming sexuality from patriarchal society. Lorde argued that "the erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings" (Lorde 56). Anamika experiences precisely this transformation, discovering herself through the intensity of her feelings for women like Tripta and Rani.

The global linkage of *Babyji* is also evident when compared with Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006). Bechdel's memoir shows her lesbian awakening parallel to that of a father

whose homosexuality remained closeted. Both Bechdel and Anamika deal with their queerness in silence, as Bechdel's was imposed by her family and Anamika's by her society. Yet where Bechdel finds herself "demoted from protagonist in my own drama to comic relief in my parents' tragedy" (*Fun Home* 58), Anamika asserts her protagonism by unapologetically pursuing her desires. Dawesar thereby inserts Indian lesbian subjectivity into the global archive of queer narratives, not as peripheral but as central.

It is also important to note that Anamika's relationships dismantles class and caste, showing her queerness within the Indian social hierarchies. Her encounters with Rani, a working-class maid, rejects not only compulsory heterosexuality but also caste and class divisions. In this sense, her desire is doubly violatory in nature. Nivedita Menon, in *Seeing Like a Feminist* (2012), states that feminism in India looks into the mixture of gender with caste and class structures. Anamika shows this entanglement and resists it, not only the patriarchal norms but the Brahminical order that wants to supervise sexuality. Globally, this is seen in Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality (1991), which studies how queer and feminist politics have overlapping oppressions. Anamika's subjectivity cannot be separated from her privilege as a Brahmin and her bravery in loving Rani.

Another way in which *Babyji* can be seen in global queer politics is through its rejection of impermanence. Elizabeth Freeman, scholar of 'Chrononormativity', is relevant not only in Western contexts but also in Indian dynamics. Anamika's refusal to follow the timeline of school → college → marriage → motherhood suspends the very idea of what a woman's life should look like. As she states after her early

sexual experiences, "I was suddenly ahead of everyone. More grown up" (Babyji 15). By placing herself outside normative timelines, she aligns with a global queer rejection of "Reproductive futurism", a concept Lee Edelman also states in *No Future* (2004). Edelman argues that queerness resists the heteronormative obsession with reproduction by refusing to be the guarantor of the future. Anamika shows this resistance, imagining a future with Sheela.

The implications of this idea are important as *Babyji* suggests that queerness in India cannot simply adopt Western models of pride parades and open declarations of queer identity; instead, it must exist in secrecy, silence, caste, class, and family structures. As Gopinath emphasises, queer South Asian desires are often seen in "the interstices and margins, in forms of attachment and affect that resist legibility" (Gopinath 11). Anamika's attachments—to Sheela, Tripta, and Rani—exist aptly in these areas. Yet their existence in silence does not diminish their importance. On the contrary, it highlights the creative flexibility of queer life.

By placing Anamika's resistance with global queer politics, Dawesar's novel shows the concurrence of Indian specificity and global solidarity. Anamika is both a Delhi schoolgirl rejecting caste, class, and patriarchy, and a queer subject whose struggles oscillate with Bechdel, Lorde, and Sedgwick. Her refusal to obey the heteronormative and patriarchal norms is both deeply Indian and global. In this way, *Babyji* shows how queer literature can destabilise national and cultural boundaries, stating that the struggle for sexual freedom is neither marginal nor isolated but greatly interconnected.

Conclusion

Thus, Abha Dawesar's *Babyji* operates as both a coming-of-age transition and a manifesto for queer resistance in India. Through Anamika's refusal to meet the heterosexual expectations, Dawesar rejects the long-standing notions of gender, sexuality, and cultural decency. The novel shows how silence, secrecy, and resistance work as interwoven plans that a person had to employ in a society where visibility often invites risk as a lesbian. Anamika's character contains this paradox—she channels the pressures of familial duty, caste privilege, and social conservatism while continuously declaring her autonomy through intimate relationships with older and different caste women. By seeing *Babyji* with the Indian feminist and global queer theoretical frameworks, we can see how the novel bridges the gap between the local and transnational struggles. Scholars such as Adrienne Rich, Judith Butler, Ruth Vanita, and Gayatri Gopinath help us to look at Anamika's defiance within the areas of compulsory heterosexuality, gender performativity, and queer temporality. Anamika's remark, "I want to be free. I don't want society telling me what to do all the time" (Dawesar 338), depicts not just an teenager rebellion against the family and society but as a deeply remarkable claim for alternative future possibility. Her imagined queer future with Sheela (Babyji 119) is a future build on care, love, desire rather than smething that is expected by the society. Anamika's relationships challenge not only patriarchal heterosexuality but also the structures of caste and class, showing how queer desire resists against multiple hierarchies at once. This aligns with Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of overlapping oppressions. The refusal to accept heteronormative timelines, *Babyji* portrays the

legitimacy of queer selfhood. Dawesar's perspective, therefore, is not just about an individual girl's awakening but about the possibilities of rethinking gender and sexuality in both Indian and global terms. Dawesar creates a collection of resistance that challenges the silences of history toward a future of multiple possibilities. Thus, queerness in *Babyji* is not limited but consists of a broader reimagining of identity, freedom, and love. By going against the heteronormative lives, Dawesar's novel claims that liberation lies not in accordance but in the courage to desire and imagine multiple future possibilities for oneself.

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