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REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-57409

Title: Biases, Binaries, and Belonging: Gender in Contemporary Indian Children's Literature

Recommendation:

- Accept as it is
- Accept after minor revision
- Accept after major revision
- Do not accept (*Reasons below*)

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality	...			
Techn. Quality		...		
Clarity	...			
Significance	...			

Reviewer's ID: JPR- 180

Detailed Reviewer's Report

The paper titled "*Biases, Binaries, and Belonging: Gender in Contemporary Indian Children's Literature*" offers a thoughtful and well-structured exploration of how gender is represented and reimagined in recent Indian children's texts. The central argument that contemporary literature challenges the earlier rigid, patriarchal, and heteronormative constructions of gender is clearly articulated and consistently developed throughout the paper. The introduction effectively situates the study within the historical evolution of Indian children's literature, contrasting traditional narratives such as Panchatantra and popular cultural texts with modern works that foreground diversity, agency, and critical engagement. This contextual grounding strengthens the paper's relevance and establishes a strong foundation for the analysis that follows. The discussion of Mayil Will Not Be Quiet is particularly insightful in demonstrating how gender norms are internalized and resisted in everyday childhood experiences. The author convincingly shows how seemingly trivial practices such as the allocation of toys or reactions to bodily changes function as mechanisms of gender conditioning. The analysis of Mayil's diary as a space of self-articulation is especially compelling, as it highlights the child's capacity for critical reflection. Furthermore, the examination of familial roles adds depth to the argument by illustrating how parents can both reinforce and challenge societal norms. Overall, this section successfully combines textual analysis with theoretical insights on gender construction and heteronormative policing.

The section on Queen of Ice expands the discussion by moving beyond everyday gender socialization to questions of power, history, and representation. The portrayal of Didda as a politically ambitious and morally complex figure effectively challenges conventional depictions of femininity in children's literature. The paper's emphasis on rejecting binary moral frameworks is a strong point, as it acknowledges children's intellectual ability to engage with ethical ambiguity. Additionally, the focus on feminist historiography and the recovery of marginalized voices adds a critical dimension to the analysis, linking literary representation with broader socio-historical concerns. The analysis of The Boy in the Cupboard is equally significant, particularly in its exploration of queer identity and spatial metaphors. The interpretation of the cupboard as a "counter-space" that allows for authentic self-expression is both original and theoretically informed. The paper effectively demonstrates how everyday acts, such as playing with certain toys or expressing joy through movement, become sites of gender policing. The role of the family as a supportive and affirming space provides a hopeful counter-narrative to societal exclusion, reinforcing the paper's broader argument about the transformative potential of contemporary children's literature.

In conclusion, the paper makes a valuable contribution to the study of gender in Indian children's literature by highlighting how recent texts move beyond representation to actively question and dismantle entrenched norms. Its strength lies in its clear argument, well-chosen texts, and integration of theoretical perspectives. However, the paper could be further strengthened by a more explicit engagement with established gender theorists and a slightly tighter organization in some analytical sections. Despite this, it remains a nuanced and insightful study that

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underscores the importance of addressing gender and identity in childhood narratives, ultimately presenting literature as a powerful tool for social change.