



Androgyny & Female Impersonation in India

Nari Bhav

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- A cross-cultural exploration of one of the most fascinating subjects to be questioned and criticized in the twenty-first century: the gender binary
- This book accesses what many westerners believe to be a modern preoccupation, through the lens of India's historically and culturally significant 'third gender'

Androgyny is an engaging subject of discussion and research in present times. This volume makes an effort to understand concepts of androgyny and 'nari bhav', or sensibility of the feminine beyond the anatomy-directed definitions, which are loosened by the nebulous realm of the third sex, or third gender. Various literary and performative traditions in India emphasize the interrelatedness of art and society. They suggest that the concept of 'nari bhav' comes from a deeply rooted cultural belief in the fluidity of female and male (symbolized, for example, by deities like Ardhanariswara). This belief, that the constant interplay of duality engenders balance and harmony in both personal and social aspects of human life, forms the basis of female impersonation in India, alongside the acknowledgment of the existence of male and female physiological and/or emotional-psychological tendencies within each individual. Such perception urges more inclusiveness in social attitudes, and easier acceptance of different sexualities and ways of expressing gender. This volume discusses concepts of androgyny that permeate the Indian cultural ethos, which are expressed through female impersonators not only in religion, theatre and dance but also in contemporary performative mediums like films, television, and the internet. This volume also contains interviews with performers of female impersonation.

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