



## Unveiling the Third Gender in Kaushik Ganguly's Arekti Premer Golpo

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### ABSTRACT

The theme of transgenderism is very obviously mirrored in Kaushik Ganguly's movie "Just Another Love Story". The movie depicts a Delhi-based transgender documentary film-maker Abhiroop Sen and his bisexual lover cinematographer, Basu Kumar. Abhiroop Sen's film crew makes a biopic of Chapal Bhaduri alias Chapal Rani, a veteran transgender jatra actor, who played women's role during 1950s. The film takes the audience through the present life of Abhiroop Sen and past life of Chapal Bhaduri, with the same actors. The paper analyses the life story of Abhiroop Sen, enacted by Rituparna, and Chapal Bhaduri, making a comparison between them, and the hardships they undergo being transgender. The film explores alternative sexual orientations and identities across two generations. The bond of sisterhood exhibited by transgender community is also focused in the film. The bond between mother and the third gender, and their role of motherhood is also hinted at. The paper implies that inspite of being progressive, our society is vindictive, unforgiving and conventional.

### KEYWORDS

Transgender, Marginalization, third sex, hijra.

### Introduction

Transgenderism has become an umbrella term for a great variety of persons who are uncomfortable with traditional gender rules. It is a term denoting relationship to a person whose self-identity does not conform to conventional notions of male or female gender roles, but combine or move between them. They may identify themselves as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, polysexual or asexual. The so-called 'third gender' or 'third sex' is often understood with the same meaning as the 'other' or 'some' gender. Like the hijra, the third gender is in many cultures made up of individuals considered male at the time of birth who take on a feminine gender role or sexual role. The transgender people all over the world face extreme discrimination in health, housing, education, employment, immigration, law and any bureaucracy as they fail to be placed in the category of either a male or a female. Hijras are often employed as prostitutes.

Arekti Premer Golpo (Just Another Love Story) is a 2010 Indian drama film written and directed by Kaushik Ganguly. It stars Rituparno Ghosh and Indraneil Sengupta in lead role. The title, says the director, is self-explanatory. "It's a love story between two men. A filmmaker and his cinematographer. The story revolves around a team which comes down to shoot a documentary on the life of Chapal Bhaduri, a stage veteran who used to essay roles of women in twentieth century Bengali stage. And how they rediscover their relationship in course of the shooting," says Ganguly about the film where Bhaduri himself plays a cameo.

This film can also be considered as the first film on homosexuality to be shot after the decriminalisation of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. Section 377, dating back to 1861, was introduced during the British rule of India. The section criminalises sexual activities "against the order of nature", arguably including homosexual acts. The section was declared unconstitutional, by the High Court of Delhi in 2009, with respect to sex between consenting adults. However, that judgement was overturned by the Supreme Court of India in December 2013.

### Analysis

The film is about Abhiroop Sen, a Delhi-based transgender documentary filmmaker, whose bisexual lover Basu, is the cinematographer. Both the characters are played by Rituparno Ghosh and Indraneil Sengupta respectively. They visit Kolkata to make a documentary on the life of the real-life legendary jatra actor Chapal Bhaduri, who in his heyday was known

as 'Chapal Rani'. Chapal is noted for his portrayal of female roles on the stage at a time when women did not perform on stage. Being a transgender, Abhiroop Sen has to face a lot of difficulties initially in the process of the making of the documentary. But with Chapal Bhaduri's support Abhiroop starts the shoot. During the course of the shoot, Abhiroop feels himself in the position of Chapal Bhaduri. The film proceeds with Abhiroop's intimate relation with Basu, who is married to Rani. On the other hand, it focuses on Chapal Bhaduri's relation with Kumar, who is married to Gopa. In the course of the film Abhiroop gets attached to Uday and Chapal Bhaduri to Thushar, both played by Jishu Sengupta. The film takes the viewers through the present life of Abhiroop Sen and past life of Chapal Bhaduri with the same actors. Both young Chapal and Abhiroop are piteously vulnerable at the hands of the society. They are used, abused, misused before being thrown away. The film focuses on the mental trauma faced by a transgender, the rejection by men, after using them sexually.

Arekti Premer Golpo creates a lot of disturbance in our mind. The film is not just a gay love story. It is more of a love story between two human beings with a strong message. The film seems to analyse the fact whether there has been any change at all. The screenplay maintains a balance between several life stories and two different time-frames. As the film begins, the two stories become entangled. Chapal's narrative builds slowly in the film-within-the-film. Simultaneously, Abhiroop's own life unravels as his relationship with Basu begins to fall apart. Though Abhiroop is much more in control of his life than Chapal, Abhiroop finds himself equally emotionally ravaged by similar betrayals. Abhiroop has to sacrifice a lot. The emotional reality of the lives of Chapal and Abhiroop forms the core of the film. As the film progresses, there is a sort of growing isolation, even from each other. This sense of isolation highlights the failures of communication between generations and marginalities. But sudden, poignant moments of empathy succeed in shaking up both the status quo and the audience. The film does not romanticise either the bond between Chapal and Abhiroop, or Abhiroop and Rani.

The director gives no clear reasons for choosing Chapal Rani as a subject in the film-within-the-film. When a reporter asks Abhiroop whether his film is about Chapal Rani's career or his sexuality, Abhiroop retorts, "If I were making a film on Amitabh Bachchan would that have been relevant? Need I say more?". Rituparno makes this point in a scene where Momo (Raima) talks to Basu about her reservations of Abhiroop's in-

tentions. Momo doubts whether Abhiroop is trying to seduce the audience with a forbidden love story. Basu replies, "Nobody knows Roop more than I do...he is anything but a coward."

Chapal Rani plays himself and is lucky to see his autobiography filmed in his lifetime. Several scenes from his childhood leave a mark. The most inspiring is a scene where Chapal is asked to shave his head after his mother's demise. He questions, "Why am I the only one who has to shave? Just because I am her son? Why doesn't Shejdi need to do it?" Later we see a parallel when Abhiroop shaves his head and his unit offers condolences. Abhiroop exclaims, "Nothing has happened. Everybody is fine at home. This is just my new hairstyle!" There is another scene which depicts Chapal taking a dip in the Ganga and refusing to step out of the water without covering himself. Only his sister seems to understand his plight and throws a gamcha into the water.

Basu stuns as the helpless bisexual man, torn between love and social restrictions. He fails out in his balancing acts and seeks refuge in a woman, betraying himself. Basu fails to give a reply when Abhiroop asks him, "Would you do the same thing when I called and you were with her?", Abhiroop feels it was strange of Basu to leave the room while attending his wife's calls. The last scene remains one of his most heart touching scenes. He is totally helpless and devastated. He had loved Abhiroop genuinely but could not gather himself to discard the society, his wife and the unborn baby. He acts under absolute compulsion and obligation. His desperate clinging on to Abhiroop is heart wrenching.

There are several intersections and contradictions in Chapal's love for bisexual Kumar and Abhiroop's love for a much-married Basu. Also Chapal's close relationship with Kumar's wife is very different from the disturbing relationship between Rani and Abhiroop. Rather in Chapal's case, he accepted to be Kumar's 'partner' out of compulsion as Gopa was bed-ridden and she had children. Chapal considered it as a penance for having betrayed Gopa. Chapal turns to be a mere domestic helper rather than a lady. The depth of their relationship is obvious from the letter that Gopa sends to Chapal in the climax of the story. In case of Basu, Rani waited for the baby to come

as she knew that she could score over Abhiroop in that point only. Basu was indifferent to the feelings of Abhiroop, atleast for a moment, when his wife informs him that she is pregnant. She didn't have an answer when confronted with the question- what would have been her reaction had Abhiroop been a woman? She wanted Abhiroop to be away from them as she felt that she would remain 'ordinary' so far as Basu keeps in touch with Abhiroop.

The film is full of symbolism and imagery. It is also poetic in places. Like the scene where Uday and Abhiroop discuss Abanindranath Tagore's painting titled 'Shondhyer Pakhi' or 'Bird Of Dusk' is brilliant. Similarly, music by Debajyoti Mishra is haunting. Bonomalee re... poro jonome hoyo Radha... has been used all through the film. However, Abhiroop makes a reference to Chaitanya as the epitome of cultural androgyny of this country. Radha and Krishna are regarded to be symbiotic. Things happened organically five hundred years ago. But now the people have claimed authority over the 'normal' ways of life.

### Conclusion

Arekti Premer Golpo can be considered to be a mature exploration of the shunned domain. The 'subaltern-no-person' existence is not just doubly marginalized, they are totally obliterated. The gays are marginalized, but the third sex is altogether negated from the societal periphery. Interestingly enough the concept of third gender is not new to Indian culture, cross-dressing had been a part of it from its inception, as obvious in the description of Vishnu as Mohini or Arjun as Vrihannala. Now it is up to the society to decide whether it will accept itself as it is or put the veil again to conform to an apparent 'normalcy'. Kaushik Ganguly's *Arekti Premer Golpo* explores third sex, bisexuality, vulnerability, hypocrisy and pathetic plight inflicted. Their lives are ruined but all are busy keeping up to that 'expected normalcy'. Kaushik Ganguly's *Arekti Premer Golpo*, the acting debut of the director was a beautiful depiction of a gay director making a film on a personality who went through the same social prejudices that he himself faces. Kaushik deftly uses Chapal's story to hinge upon his own story of androgynous people in the society, whose existence is almost wiped out for some obscure reason. The film is a welcome whiff of fresh air for Bengali mainstream cinema.

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