



Research Article

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Non-Binary Gender Communication Through the Film: Arekti Premer Golpo

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ABSTRACT

Cinema has always been a powerful medium to reflect societal norms, question prevailing ideologies, and amplify the voices of the marginalized. In the context of India, where LGBTQ+ identities often remain silenced under the weight of prejudice and systemic discrimination, films become a vital tool for fostering dialogue and challenging stereotypes. Kaushik Ganguly's *Arekti Premer Golpo* (Just Another Love Story) (Megh Peoner Bag, 2024), a 2010 Bengali drama, masterfully intertwines two parallel narratives to explore the complexities of gender, sexuality, and societal acceptance. The film dives into the life of Chapal Bhaduri, the last female impersonator of Bengali theatre, whose existence becomes both a testament to resilience and a critique of rigid gender binaries. Chapal's journey, marked by defiance against societal norms, mirrors the struggles of countless queer individuals fighting for identity and validation in a heteronormative society. Simultaneously, the behind-the-scenes narrative of a documentary crew chronicling Chapal's story uncovers modern-day tensions around queer relationships, making the film a layered exploration of historical and contemporary queer experiences. The story interrogates the intersectionality of sexual identity, cultural tradition, and societal hypocrisy. It unpacks the myths surrounding LGBTQIA++ identities in Indian cinema and society, bringing to light the desires, aspirations, and marginalization of queer individuals. The film challenges audiences to reconsider the constructed nature of gender roles and confront the enduring homophobia and transphobia embedded in both public consciousness and media portrayals. Here the director goes beyond the boundaries of conventional cinema, offering a narrative that is not just about love but about reclaiming identity and resisting erasure. It positions itself as a cinematic strike against the exclusionary norms of Indian society, urging the audience to view queer lives through a lens of empathy, acceptance, and justice. The film thus stands as a vital contribution to queer representation in Bengali cinema, embodying the transformative potential of art in advocating for equality and dismantling the prejudices that silence marginalized voices.

INTRODUCTION

In a country like India, where rigid societal norms and deeply entrenched hierarchies govern the landscape of gender and sexuality, representations of queer identities have often been relegated to the periphery. Historically, LGBTQ+ individuals have faced oppression, violence, and social invisibility, with their lives either erased or distorted in mainstream media. The decriminalization of Section 377 in 2009, which marked a significant milestone

in the fight for LGBTQ+ rights, was a historic legal victory. However, it remained only a small victory in a society where the specter of homophobia and transphobia continues to haunt the lives of many. Kaushik Ganguly's 2010 film *Arekti Premer Golpo* (Just Another Love Story) (Megh Peoner Bag, 2024) boldly steps into this complex social terrain, providing an unflinching portrayal of the lives of transgender and queer individuals in India (Kaustav, 2010). The film is both a cinematic exploration of love and

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identity and a critique of the oppressive societal norms that marginalize gender non-conforming individuals.

At its core, this is a story about two men—a filmmaker, Abhiroop Sen (played by Rituparno Ghosh), and his cinematographer, Basu (Indraneil Sengupta), whose intimate and complicated relationship forms the emotional crux of the narrative. Abhiroop is a transgender filmmaker tasked with documenting the life of Chapal Bhaduri, a celebrated actor in Bengali theatre known for portraying female roles during a time when women were not permitted to perform on stage. Through the juxtaposition of the personal and professional lives of these two central characters, Ganguly tackles themes of gender fluidity, desire, betrayal, and identity (Bakshi, 2014). The narrative structure of *Arekti Premer Golpo* (Megh Peoner Bag, 2024) is multilayered, blending a biographical exploration of Chapal Bhaduri's life with the emotional turmoil experienced by Abhiroop as he contemplates his own identity and relationship dynamics. The film uses the life of Chapal Bhaduri as both a source of inspiration and a cautionary tale for Abhiroop. Bhaduri's life as a performer in the jatra tradition—one that involves male actors playing female roles on stage, serves as a critical lens through which the film explores the complex intersections of gender, performance, and societal expectations (Roy, 2023). His experiences as a transgender person who faced both adulation and scorn for his artistry mirror those of Abhiroop, whose own gender identity places him at odds with conventional society (Chatterjee, 2021). Both characters embody the painful tensions of being in love with individuals whose identities are not easily accepted by the broader society. They exist in a space where their love is fraught with societal disapproval, and their respective sexual and gender identities become sites of emotional and psychological conflict.

The film addresses the struggles of both homosexual and transgender people within Indian society, which remains entrenched in its expectations of binary gender roles (Sajna, 2014). Abhiroop, who is bisexual, must grapple with a life of secrecy and emotional isolation as he navigates the boundaries of his relationship with Basu. Basu, despite his genuine love for Abhiroop, is caught in the web of societal expectations, torn between his wife Rani and his love for Abhiroop (Chatterji, 2011). He seeks solace in the arms of his wife, Rani, as a way to placate the pressures of social conformity. His inability to transcend these boundaries ultimately leads to the dissolution of his relationship with Abhiroop. Rani's jealousy and insecurity further complicate the emotional dynamics between the characters, as she questions her place in a relationship that she feels is compromised by Abhiroop's gender identity (Karmakar, 2025). The film presents a delicate balance between two love stories, the love between Abhiroop and Basu and the love between Chapal and Kumar. The relationships are not romanticized; rather, they are

presented with all their complexities and painful realities. Through these two relationships, *Arekti Premer Golpo* (Megh Peoner Bag, 2024) interrogates the notion of love as a site of both freedom and repression (Datta, 2011). The film is not just about the romantic and emotional entanglements of the characters but also about their attempts to define and assert their identities in the face of overwhelming societal pressure. It provides a nuanced exploration of the emotional toll that love and desire take on those who live on the margins, and the alienation and internal conflict that often accompany their expressions of affection (Chatterjee, 2021).

One of the most poignant aspects of the film is the emotional resonance of the characters' journeys. Chapal's life, as depicted through the lens of the documentary being made by Abhiroop, is a tragic tale of resilience and sacrifice (Bakshi, 2014). Chapal, who is forced to assume the role of both a woman and a sexual object in the eyes of society, is ultimately used, abused, and cast aside. His story is one of survival in a world that cannot accept his true self. Similarly, Abhiroop's journey is marked by a deep emotional struggle as he navigates the terrain of unrequited love, betrayal, and societal rejection (Sengupta & Ganjoo, 2021). The film captures his growing isolation, both from Basu and from society at large, as he becomes increasingly disillusioned with his inability to find acceptance. The film does not offer easy resolutions for its characters. Instead, it offers a raw and unvarnished portrayal of the pain and anguish that accompany living as a marginalized person in a world that refuses to accommodate difference (Roy, 2023). *Arekti Premer Golpo* (Megh Peoner Bag, 2024) is also notable for its portrayal of the cultural and historical dimensions of gender non-conformity in India. The film draws on the legacy of the hijra community, a group of transgender individuals who have historically occupied a unique position in Indian society, often as ritual performers or caregivers, but whose lives are often marked by exclusion and marginalization (Sajna, 2014). The film highlights the cultural tension between the historic visibility of hijras and the contemporary invisibility of transgender people in Indian society (Mondal, 2020). Chapal's own experiences as a performer in the *jatra* tradition, where men take on female roles in a form of gender performance, further underscores the film's interrogation of the ways in which gender roles are constructed and policed (Dasgupta, 2011). The juxtaposition of the personal and professional narratives in the film also serves to highlight the internal conflict of the characters. Abhiroop's professional journey as a filmmaker parallels his personal journey of self-discovery. As he shoots the documentary on Chapal Bhaduri's life, he is forced to confront his own identity and desires. The relationship between Abhiroop and Basu is constantly tested by the expectations of society, and Basu's inability to fully embrace Abhiroop's identity as a transgender person only exacerbates the tensions between



them (Sarkar, 2018). The film also explores the idea of the “film within a film,” where the documentary being made by Abhiroop becomes a metaphor for his own search for truth and authenticity. As Abhiroop films the life of Chapal Bhaduri, he is also attempting to capture his own truth, to uncover the layers of his identity that he has kept hidden for fear of rejection (Lakshmi & David, 2021).

Beyond this, several films from various genres and geographical areas have added to the conversation on non-binary identity. Njan Marykutty (2018), an Indian film, examines how a transgender lady deals with societal prejudice and institutional injustice. By questioning strict binary conventions, the movie expands knowledge of gender diversity even if it isn't overtly non-binary (Thomas, 2019). In a similar vein, *Super Deluxe* (2019) highlights the daily difficulties and psychological anguish associated with gender non-conformity by showcasing a trans character whose path defies traditional assumptions (Rao, 2020). Gender-fluid and non-binary experiences are explicitly addressed in international films like *They* (2017) and *Tomboy* (2011). Céline Sciamma's film *Tomboy* delicately depicts a youngster investigating gender identity outside of socially prescribed categories, emphasising how peer and family pressure affects self-perception (Smith, 2014). *They* (2017) highlight the psychological challenges of navigating a culture that requires definability by focussing on a youngster who identifies as gender-fluid (Khan, 2018). By emphasising the emotional and interpersonal effects of societal marginalisation, both films add to a nuanced portrayal of non-binary life.

The emotional heart of the film lies in its depiction of the psychological trauma experienced by Abhiroop and Chapal, both of whom have been rejected and marginalized by society (Sajna, 2014). Their stories serve as a powerful critique of the ways in which societal norms dictate the parameters of love and identity, leaving little room for deviation or expression outside of accepted gender roles (Bakshi, 2014). The film highlights the emotional devastation that results from being forced to conceal one's true identity and the psychological scars that are left when one is unable to live authentically (Karmakar, 2025). To sum up, the film tackles the complexities of queer love, gender identity, and societal marginalization with sensitivity and nuance (Chatterjee, 2021). Through its exploration of the lives of transgender and bisexual individuals, the film shines a light on the harsh realities faced by those who exist outside the bounds of conventional gender and sexual norms (Sengupta & Ganjoo, 2021). Kaushik Ganguly deftly uses the stories of Abhiroop and Chapal to interrogate the intersectionality of gender, love, and societal expectations, offering a poignant and challenging reflection on the state of queer representation in Indian cinema (Chatterji, 2011). The film's emotional depth, symbolic imagery, and poignant performances by its cast make it a landmark work in the representation of queer identities in Indian film. It

is a call to action for society to move beyond its restrictive notions of gender and sexuality and to embrace a more inclusive and compassionate vision of the world.

Plot Discussion & Third Gender Narrative

The discourse surrounding the body as a cultural signifier has gained prominence, particularly since the second wave of feminism. However, viewing the body as a site for alternative gender narratives has emerged more prominently in critical discussions only in the latter half of the twentieth century. This is when traditional male-female binaries in gender theory began to be seriously questioned (Chatterjee, 2021). Kaushik Ganguly's film, *Arekti Premer Golpo* (*Megh Peoner Bag*, 2024), delves deep into these discussions by interrogating stereotypes in gender roles and questioning the very concept of identity (Sajna, 2014). The film explores whether identity, when politicized to an extreme, risks eroding individuality. At its core, the narrative reflects a journey of selfhood, examining societal perceptions of the body, the marginalization of nonconforming gender identities, and the deep pain associated with this marginalization (Bakshi, 2014). The film operates on two interconnected narrative planes. On one level, it portrays the story of Abhiroop Sen, a gay documentary filmmaker from Delhi, who travels to Kolkata with his partner, Basu, to shoot a film on Chapal Bhaduri. Chapal is an iconic figure in Bengali theatre, celebrated as one of the first openly gay actors who played female roles on stage (Chatterji, 2011). The second narrative plane uses flashbacks to delve into Chapal's life, especially his struggles with societal expectations and his sexuality. Ganguly's decision to cast Chapal Bhaduri as himself in the film adds a fascinating layer of meta-narration. Similarly, Rituparno Ghosh's dual portrayal as both Abhiroop Sen and the younger Chapal Bhaduri reinforces the interplay of art imitating life.

The film's narrative structure uses the concept of the gaze as a dual mechanism—both as an oppressive force and as a tool to engage the audience in exploring societal prejudices toward gender and body (Sajna, 2014; Chatterjee, 2021). The opening scene establishes this theme vividly. It features Chapal Bhaduri, dressed as Ma Shitala, the goddess of plague, performing on stage and pleading for an “establishment” from a local landlord. This plea reflects the broader societal truth: established norms and identities are respected, while the marginalized are left on the fringes. Ma Shitala's myth becomes a potent subtext, symbolizing the forced seclusion and concealment of bodily realities, much like Chapal's life as a gender-nonconforming individual (Sengupta & Ganjoo, 2021). The title card of the film subtly critiques the heterosexual matrix of Bengali society, referencing the dominance of romantic on-screen pairs like Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen in 1959, alongside the global accolades earned by Satyajit Ray's cinema. While these

cultural icons epitomized traditional and meaningful narratives, they offered no voice to alternative gender discourses (Bakshi, 2014). In this context, Chapal Rani (as Chapal Bhaduri was popularly known) emerges as a revolutionary figure, embodying the voice of the oppressed by performing female roles on stage during this same era (Karmakar, 2025).

A recurring motif in the film is the mirror image, symbolizing society's imposed perceptions of the body. The opening sequence shows Abhiroop applying kajal to his eyes, a practice typically associated with Hindu women. This deliberate visual choice creates an ambiguity in Abhiroop's gender identity, challenging societal norms (Sajna, 2014). Similarly, the flashbacks of Chapal reveal him putting on makeup to prepare for his female stage roles, drawing parallels between the lives of the two protagonists. Both characters remain marginalized in their relationships, unable to find fulfilment due to their partners' inability to reconcile their bisexuality with societal expectations (Bakshi, 2014). The patriarchal structures of society label Abhiroop as a "homo," reducing him to a detestable figure in a gender-biased world. This marginalization is evident when locals protest against the filming of Chapal Bhaduri's story, urging Abhiroop not to appear before the crowd (Chatterji, 2011). His mannerisms, speech, and clothing are seen as deviations from societal norms, inviting ridicule. Susan Bordo's insights in *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* resonate here, as she argues that the body becomes a locus of social control and cultural inscription. Ganguly further complicates the narrative by introducing Uday, a supporting character who facilitates the film crew's search for alternative shooting locations after facing resistance in North Kolkata. Uday's comments on Abhiroop's appearance, such as his "desperate" hairstyle, prompt Abhiroop to shave his head, highlighting the body as a site of protest. However, this protest is critiqued as performative rather than authentic (Roy, 2023). Chapal questions Abhiroop's fixation on filming his transformation into female roles, asking why he doesn't capture the moments of undressing—the times when his true self emerges. This contrast between performative protest and lived reality underscores the complexities of constructing identity (Karmakar, 2025).

For Chapal, his body feels like a prison—a woman's soul trapped in a man's body. This dissonance creates an epistemological gap, a space where traditional language and societal constructs fail to capture the essence of his experience (Sajna, 2014). On the other hand, Abhiroop envisions his body as a site for constructing an autonomous identity for the "third gender." Yet, his long hair and unconventional clothing become markers of identity politics, often reducing him to stereotypes (Bakshi, 2014).

Judith Butler's perspective on gender as a performative act rather than a fixed noun provides a theoretical

framework for understanding the film. Butler argues that subjects are formed through the performative domains of representation, and only those who meet specific qualifications are acknowledged as subjects (Roy, 2023). In *Arekti Premer Golpo (Megh Peoner Bag, 2024)*, Chapal's stage performances offer him a space to construct his identity, drawing on the mythical subtexts of local legends (Sengupta & Ganjoo, 2021). For Abhiroop, the camera becomes a tool for protest and self-expression, turning Chapal's narrative into a psycho-biographical frame for exploring his own identity (Chatterjee, 2021).

The film also critiques the capitalist politics of body image. Abhiroop's "queer" clothing and behavior challenge the heteronormative expectations of masculinity, leading to his marginalization (Bakshi, 2014). Chapal, too, faced societal rejection despite performing female roles in jatra (open-air theatre), where such roles were traditionally reserved for men (Sajna, 2014). However, when Chapal sought personal validation and identity beyond the stage, he encountered harsh rejection, especially from Kumar Babu, who viewed homosexuality as degrading to his virile male image (Sengupta & Ganjoo, 2021). Chapal's longing for a family outside the heterosexual framework is tragically unfulfilled. His dreams are shattered when he is dismissed from the theatre to make way for "real" women actors. Left to navigate life in forced seclusion, he oscillates between theatre, Tarapith, and his ancestral home in Baghbazar, embodying the loneliness of those who live outside societal norms. Abhiroop, in contrast, represents a more liberated generation. His metropolitan background and education provide him with platforms to voice his opinions, even in the face of resistance (Karmakar, 2025). However, his journey remains fraught with challenges. The constant gaze of society—represented by the car driver adjusting his rearview mirror to look at him or a journalist labelling him a "faggot"—forces him to confront his identity as a site of protest.

The film's use of music and intertextual references deepens its exploration of loneliness and marginalization. Abhiroop is called a "Bird of Dusk" by Tushar, his mentee, evoking the symbolism of evening as a metaphor for the mortification of the soul (Sengupta & Ganjoo, 2021). Chapal's moments of fleeting joy, such as dancing with Kumar Babu's ailing wife to Rabindranath Tagore's "Prano bhorie trisha horie", capture his desperate search for meaning in a world that denies him acceptance (Sajna, 2014). Ultimately, *Arekti Premer Golpo (Megh Peoner Bag, 2024)* presents a sobering commentary on the plight of transgender and non-binary individuals. The protagonists' inability to find a place within the heterosexual institution of family underscores their exclusion from dominant social narratives (Sarkar, 2018). They remain, as the film poignantly portrays, nameless and unaccepted pronouns, devoid of human dignity. The concluding song in the film, inspired by the myth of Radha and Krishna, encapsulates



this timeless suffering. Radha's eternal loneliness mirrors the protagonists' quest for belonging and identity in a world that refuses to acknowledge them (Karmakar, 2025). The film challenges viewers to reflect on the boundaries of representation, identity, and acceptance, leaving a haunting reminder of the pain endured by those who exist outside the norms of heteronormative society.

Arekti Premer Golpo (2010), directed by Kaushik Ganguly, is among the pioneering Indian films that focus on non-binary and gender-nonconforming identities within a pronounced queer narrative. The movie features Chapal Bhaduri, portrayed by Rituparno Ghosh, and challenges rigid distinctions between male and female by presenting gender as a fluid performance rather than a fixed biological trait. The film employs a dual narrative structure, linking the historical challenges faced by a jatra performer with the contemporary experiences of a queer filmmaker. This technique illustrates the continuity of non-binary identities across different generations. By normalising gender diversity on screen and providing a counter-narrative to the prevailing heteronormative framework of Indian cinema, the film supports non-binary gender communication. Gender identity is positioned as highly personal yet socially formed, with an emphasis on self-expression, emotional vulnerability, and the politics of visibility (Ghosh, 2012). It had a big influence on how people are portrayed now since it made room for following Indian films that more authentically portrayed the lives of gay and non-binary people. As a result of the cultural change sparked by early queer cinema like *Arekti Premer Golpo*, transgender and gender-fluid characters are now more frequently included in modern films and streaming series (Roy, 2019). The movie continues to be a milestone in promoting inclusive gender discourse in Indian media by humanising a variety of identities.

Using the framework of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, *Arekti Premer Golpo* (2010) offers a potent lens through which to view non-binary gender communication. Butler contends that gender is a collection of recurring behaviours, gestures, and performances that provide the appearance of a stable gender rather than an innate identity (Butler, 1990). This performative aspect of gender is best illustrated by the film's depiction of Abhiroop, a gay filmmaker who embraces both masculine and feminine traits. Abhiroop challenges binary gender standards with her mannerisms, speech patterns, clothing, and emotional expressiveness, showing that gender identity is performed rather than physiologically set. Butler's concepts are further demonstrated by the parallel story of Chapal Bhaduri, a jatra artist renowned for portraying female roles. The socially created limits between "male" and "female" are exposed by Chapal's onstage femininity and offstage self-negotiation. Through Chapal's performances, the movie illustrates how cultural scripts and audience expectations may construct gender in a fluid, situational, and communicative way. The

characters in both stories challenge gender stereotypes by consistently adopting identities that defy expectations. As a result, the movie functions as a site of resistance where non-binary identities are expressed through interpersonal interactions, visual representation, and physical activities. *Arekti Premer Golpo*'s emphasis on performativity not only challenges established gender norms but also emphasises the ability of performance to communicate queer subjectivities (Butler, 1993).

Framing Discussion

1. The film begins by introducing Abhiroop Sen, played by Rituparno Ghosh, a non-binary documentary filmmaker from Delhi, along with her bisexual partner, Basu (Indraneil Sengupta), who serves as the cinematographer. The duo travels to Kolkata to create a documentary on Chapal Bhaduri, a renowned Jatra actor famously known as "Chapal Rani." Bhaduri gained prominence for portraying female characters during an era when women were barred from performing on stage. The opening sequence captures the first day of shooting, with Abhiroop applying makeup to Chapal Bhaduri. During this moment, Bhaduri humorously complains about leftover kajal on his face, teasing Abhiroop, who is also wearing kajal. While this interaction may appear to address a trivial continuity matter for the film, it carries a deeper significance for Abhiroop. The scene subtly reflects their longing for acceptance and acknowledgment of their feminine identity. It also draws attention to the societal struggles surrounding gender expression, exposing the inequalities in how different identities are viewed and valued.

The opening sequence of the film immediately establishes the film's exploration of non-binary gender communication by introducing Abhiroop Sen, a non-binary filmmaker, and juxtaposing their identity with that of Chapal Bhaduri, a figure whose gender performance was a necessity of his art. This interplay between the two characters highlights the continuity of struggles faced by individuals who challenge or transcend binary gender norms, albeit in different contexts. Abhiroop's application of makeup to Chapal is not merely a preparatory act for the documentary but a symbolic moment of shared experience. It bridges their journeys, underscoring how gender expression whether through makeup, attire,



Figure 1 : Film *Arekti Premer Golpo*- 2010 (YouTube) Access on 10.09.2025

or performance becomes both a medium of personal authenticity and a site of societal scrutiny. Chapal's humorous complaint about the leftover *kajal*, contrasted with Abhiroop's own makeup, subtly draws attention to the layered meanings of such expressions: for Chapal, it is tied to his theatrical legacy, while for Abhiroop, it signifies an assertion of their feminine identity amidst a heteronormative world. This scene encapsulates the theme of non-binary gender communication by illustrating how personal identity and public perception intersect. Abhiroop's longing for acceptance reflects the universal desire of non-binary individuals to be seen and respected for who they are. By weaving this interaction into the film's narrative, the filmmakers highlight the shared resilience of those who navigate a world that often marginalizes non-conformity. This moment humanizes both characters but critiques the societal inequalities in valuing diverse gender identities, reinforcing the film's central message of inclusivity and the necessity of broadening societal perspectives on gender.

2. In this frame, the directors skillfully take the audience into Chapal Bhaduri's past, a significant choice given that the documentary centers on his life. The narrative begins with the tragic loss of Chapal's mother during his early childhood, a moment of immense confusion and vulnerability for him. At this tender age, Chapal struggled to conform to societal expectations, feeling burdened by obligations that clashed with his inner identity. He candidly reflects on how he felt that God had erred in creating him, granting him a male body that conflicted with his inherently feminine heart, mind, and nature, a truth that others around him failed to comprehend. Chapal recounts the experience of performing the *mundan* ceremony, a Hindu ritual where a male successor shaves their head after the death of a parent or elder—a custom not extended to women. Following his mother's death, relatives insisted that Chapal perform the ritual. He initially resisted, questioning why his sister was not subjected to the same tradition. However, societal pressures alienated him, forcing him to comply. He recounts the humiliation of being treated as though performing this ritual would somehow affirm his masculinity, a role that was fundamentally at odds with his identity. This alienation extended to the subsequent ritual, where participants are required to immerse themselves in the holy waters of the Ganga. As a male, Chapal was expected to do this half-naked, in stark contrast to women, who were permitted to wear clothes. This moment of public exposure left him feeling deeply humiliated, as he struggled to cover his body with his hands, acutely aware of the judgmental gaze of onlookers. His sister, empathetic to his distress, threw him a towel, a small yet meaningful act of compassion. This recollection profoundly impacts Abhiroop, who recognizes the immense pain these memories still cause Chapal. Sympathizing with him, Abhiroop expresses a willingness to abandon the documentary if revisiting such memories



Figure 2: Film *Arekti Premer Golpo*- 2010 (YouTube) Access on 10.09.2025

feels like reopening old wounds. Their conversation is interrupted by an abrupt call for a lunch break, leaving the emotional moment unresolved.

This frame goes deep into Chapal Bhaduri's past, using his recollections to illuminate the intersection of personal trauma and societal expectations that shape non-binary gender communication. The narrative of Chapal's childhood, marked by the death of his mother and the rigid rituals imposed upon him, powerfully illustrates the dissonance between societal norms and individual identity. Chapal's confession that he felt God had erred in giving him a male body while his heart and mind aligned with femininity reflects the internal struggle of many non-binary individuals who navigate a world that fails to accommodate their lived realities. The *mundan* ceremony, traditionally reserved for male heirs, serves as a symbolic imposition of a gender role that Chapal instinctively resisted. His questioning of why his sister was exempt underscores the arbitrary nature of gendered traditions that perpetuate inequality. Furthermore, the requirement to immerse in the Ganga half-naked, unlike women who were allowed to remain clothed, starkly highlights how societal norms exacerbate the vulnerability of those whose identities do not align with these rigid binaries. The humiliation Chapal experienced, as he tried to shield himself from the judgmental gaze of onlookers, captures the profound alienation faced by individuals forced to conform to roles that negate their sense of self. This frame aligns with the subject of the film by showcasing how gender non-conforming individuals must contend with societal expectations that undermine their identity. Chapal's sister's empathetic act of throwing him a towel stands as a rare moment of solidarity, underscoring the importance of compassion in addressing the isolation faced by non-binary individuals. Chapal's pain also deeply resonates with Abhiroop, bridging their experiences across time and reinforcing the theme of shared struggles in non-binary gender communication. Abhiroop's willingness to prioritize Chapal's emotional well-being over completing the documentary reflects a deep understanding of the psychological toll of revisiting traumatic memories. The unresolved nature of this moment, interrupted by a call for lunch, further symbolizes the unfinished dialogue around

non-binary identities in society, emphasizing the need for continued conversations and understanding to address the marginalization of such individuals.

3. In this frame, the complexities of Abhiroop and Basu's relationship are subtly revealed. On the surface, their bond might appear uncomplicated, but the nuances of their identities and circumstances create an undercurrent of tension. Basu, a bisexual man, is openly acknowledged by society but is also married, a concession to societal expectations that he neither challenges nor fully embraces. This duality frequently causes friction in their relationship, as Abhiroop struggles with the emotional consequences of their dynamic. Abhiroop openly shares her frustrations, explaining how it affects her when Basu immediately leaves the room or moves to a distant place whenever his wife calls. This behavior leaves Abhiroop feeling hollow and prompts moments of self-critique, as though her identity or their love is somehow less valid or "abnormal." Her words reflect a deep yearning for a sense of normalcy, an existence where she can love freely without the constraints of judgment or societal expectations. However, Basu's evasive and superficial excuses only heighten Abhiroop's feelings of desperation. The lack of resolution in their conversations makes her feel increasingly demanding and vulnerable, leading her to cut short her argument, resigned to the reality of their complicated relationship. This moment highlights the emotional toll of navigating love in a world that imposes rigid norms, leaving Abhiroop caught between hope and heartbreak.

Here the intricate dynamics of Abhiroop and Basu's relationship, sheds light on the emotional struggles that arise when love is entangled with societal expectations and personal identity. Basu's dual existence, his open acknowledgment as a bisexual man juxtaposed with his marriage to a woman, serves as a stark reminder of the compromises often made to conform to societal norms. His unwillingness to confront these contradictions creates an unresolved tension that deeply affects Abhiroop, highlighting the complexities of non-binary gender communication within intimate relationships. Abhiroop's frustration stems from Basu's habitual distancing whenever his wife calls, an act that symbolizes the unequal footing of their relationship. For Abhiroop, this behavior is

a painful reminder of her marginalized position, not just as Basu's partner, but as a non-binary individual striving for recognition and acceptance in a heteronormative world. Her self-critique and longing for normalcy reflect the internalized struggles faced by those whose identities and relationships challenge societal norms. The deep yearning in her words underscores the emotional labor required to sustain love when one's identity and relationship are constantly invalidated by external judgments. Basu's superficial excuses and reluctance to address the imbalance in their dynamic amplify Abhiroop's vulnerability, pushing her toward resignation. Her decision to cut the argument short reflects a profound weariness, an acknowledgment of the futility of seeking validation in a relationship constrained by societal boundaries. This resignation is emblematic of the emotional toll experienced by non-binary individuals when navigating love in a world that imposes rigid, binary frameworks on gender and relationships. This frame explores the challenges of non-binary gender communication within intimate spaces. Abhiroop's struggles reveal the intersection of personal identity, societal expectations, and the complexities of love, emphasizing how deeply these forces influence non-binary individuals. This moment highlights the emotional costs of such relationships but also reinforces the need for a more inclusive society where love and identity can exist without compromise or concealment.

4. On the first day of filming, a young reporter from a reputed local news outlet arrived to interview Abhiroop. With a direct and probing approach, the reporter asked about the film's subject, framing the question around whether it aimed to spotlight Chapal Bhaduri's sexual preferences or assign him a new and unconventional identity, concepts the reporter implied were unfamiliar to the "immature" society. This question deeply upset Abhiroop, who reacted immediately by questioning the relevance of a character's sexuality to the making of an autobiography. Frustrated, she walked away from the interview, unwilling to dignify the reporter's insinuations further. However, the reporter, dissatisfied with her response, weaponized the power of the media, spreading a skewed and radical interpretation of the film's purpose. The misrepresentation quickly stirred controversy in Kolkata's local film community and made headlines the following day. Fueled by misinformation, outraged locals stormed the shooting location, accusing the filmmakers of exploiting Chapal Bhaduri for money. They claimed that foreign funding was being used to impose progressive ideologies on the youth, particularly around homosexuality, which they argued should not be promoted. The situation escalated as the locals grew more aggressive, vowing to halt the project altogether. They blamed the directors and producers for using Chapal's story to advance what they perceived as an agenda, labeling it a threat to societal norms. Unable to reason with the mob through civil discourse, Abhiroop and the team



Figure 3: Film Arekti Premer Golpo- 2010 (YouTube) Access on 10.09.2025



Figure 4: Film *Aarekti Premer Golpo*- 2010 (YouTube) Access on 10.09.2025

had no choice but to search for an alternative location to continue filming. This incident underscores the pervasive prejudice and hostility faced by non-binary individuals in a deeply conservative society. It highlights how entrenched biases label them as “abnormal” or mentally ill, and how public narratives about their identities are often co-opted to reinforce societal restrictions, silencing their voices in the process.

This frame captures a pivotal moment that starkly illustrates the societal hostility and prejudice faced by non-binary individuals and the LGBTQ community at large. The confrontation between Abhiroop and the reporter underscores the pervasive tendency to conflate gender identity and sexual orientation with scandal, a tactic often used to delegitimize non-binary voices and narratives. The reporter’s framing of the interview reflects a deep-rooted societal discomfort with identities that challenge the heteronormative binary, and their subsequent actions highlight how media power can amplify ignorance and bias. Abhiroop’s immediate reaction to the reporter’s intrusive and reductive questioning serves as a defiant assertion of her integrity and respect for Chapal Bhaduri’s story. Her decision to walk away signifies a refusal to entertain narratives that reduce complex identities to sensationalized headlines. Yet, this act of defiance triggers an even larger backlash, as the misrepresentation of the film’s purpose fuels societal outrage. The ensuing mob violence and accusations reveal the fragility of conservative societies when confronted with narratives that challenge their normative frameworks. The locals’ claim that the film seeks to impose progressive ideologies on youth exemplifies the resistance to change and the fear of disrupting entrenched patriarchal and heteronormative norms. This incident vividly aligns with the film’s central theme of non-binary gender communication, showcasing the structural and societal barriers that obstruct the expression and acknowledgment of non-binary identities. The mob’s aggressive reaction reflects the larger societal impulse to silence non-binary voices by labeling them as threats to tradition and morality. The hostility and resistance Abhiroop faces mirror the struggles of many individuals who dare to challenge the binary gender

paradigm, illustrating the emotional, physical, and professional costs of such resistance. By juxtaposing Abhiroop’s defiance with the mob’s violence, this frame underscores the urgent need for societal transformation. It calls attention to the power of narratives in shaping public perception and the responsibility of media and art to challenge prejudices rather than reinforce them. Through this lens, the film not only critiques the societal structures that marginalize non-binary individuals but also emphasizes the resilience and courage required to confront these barriers, making this frame a powerful commentary on the broader struggles of gender non-conforming individuals.

5. As the director explores Chapal Bhaduri’s past, the narrative adopts a unique storytelling device, blending two timelines into a parallel universe. In this seamless overlap, the characters take on double roles, mirroring their emotions while recontextualizing them in modern settings. The film beautifully juxtaposes Chapal da’s younger years, when he performed in Jatra, a traditional form of folk theatre, with the present day, creating a poetic resonance between the two eras. This duality not only brings depth to the story but also highlights how deeply intertwined Chapal’s past and Abhiroop’s present are. Through this narrative device, Rituparno Ghosh and Indraneil Sengupta take on dual characters. They portray Abhiroop and Basu in the present, filming the documentary, while simultaneously embodying the young Chapal da and Kumar during the romanticized flashbacks. This parallel storytelling draws striking connections between their lives. Just as Abhiroop struggles with Basu’s secret marriage to Rani, Kumar is shown to be married to Gopa, with two children, while also sharing a forbidden love with Chapal. In both cases, the wives remain oblivious to their husbands’ hidden relationships, intensifying the emotional tension. The interplay between these timelines reveals a common thread of secrecy, societal judgment, and forbidden love. The lens of the camera in the present becomes the metaphorical “gun,” capturing the complexities of love under societal scrutiny. The gaze of the deer, symbolizing innocence, turns into the collective judgment of outsiders and society, echoing the challenges faced by those in non-conventional relationships. The significance of Jatra goes beyond its theatrical stylization, with its dramatic gestures and elaborate orations. For Chapal, Jatra became a sanctuary, a space where someone deemed an outsider could find refuge and self-expression. Choosing this art form at a young age was perhaps not only a celebration of creativity but also an act of rebellion and self-realization. Through the character of Chapal Rani, Chapal found a means to articulate his inner self, transcending the societal constraints that sought to silence him. This dual narrative elegantly weaves together art, identity, and love, painting a poignant portrait of lives lived on the margins of acceptance.



Figure 5: Film Arekti Premer Golpo- 2010 (YouTube) Access on 10.09.2025

This frame exemplifies the ingenious narrative device employed in this film, where the past and present intertwine to craft a poignant commentary on the universality of non-binary struggles across time. By seamlessly integrating two timelines, the film transcends linear storytelling, creating a parallel universe that connects Chapal Bhaduri's poignant past with Abhiroop's tumultuous present. The dual roles played by Rituparno Ghosh and Indraneil Sengupta amplify this connection, with the actors embodying both the present-day filmmakers (Abhiroop and Basu) and the historical figures (Chapal and Kumar) in flashbacks, thereby weaving a rich tapestry of intergenerational experiences. The juxtaposition of these timelines is not merely a stylistic choice but a deliberate commentary on the cyclicity of marginalization faced by non-binary individuals. Both narratives depict forbidden love shrouded in secrecy, with Chapal and Kumar, and Abhiroop and Basu, navigating the treacherous waters of societal condemnation. The duality of their relationships mirrors the enduring repression imposed by societal constructs, where heteronormativity forces non-binary relationships into the shadows. Both Kumar and Basu conform outwardly to societal expectations through their heterosexual marriages, leaving Chapal and Abhiroop to grapple with the anguish of invisibility and invalidation. The mirroring of these stories lends the film a universal resonance, revealing how societal judgment continues to oppress those living on the fringes of binary expectations. The film's symbolic motifs deepen its thematic resonance. The camera in the present becomes a powerful metaphorical "gun," capturing the vulnerability of love under societal scrutiny. This imagery underscores the invasive gaze of a society quick to judge and condemn those who deviate from normative standards. Similarly, the gaze of the deer, a recurring motif, symbolizes the innocence of love and the cruelty of societal surveillance, transforming into a haunting emblem of judgment. These visual metaphors elevate the narrative, transforming it into a cinematic critique of social conservatism. Jatra, the folk theatrical tradition central to Chapal's formative years, transcends its cultural significance to become a sanctuary of self-expression. For Chapal, Jatra is more than an art form, it is an act of defiance, a medium through

which he articulates his identity in a world determined to silence him. Through the character of Chapal Rani, he not only embodies his femininity but also reclaims agency over his identity, challenging the gendered constructs of his time. The theatricality of Jatra, with its dramatic gestures and exaggerated performances, serves as a metaphor for the performativity of gender itself, revealing the fluidity and constructed nature of identity. This frame masterfully intertwines themes of art, love, and identity, offering a definitive commentary on the resilience of non-binary individuals in the face of societal oppression. By aligning Chapal's journey with Abhiroop's present struggles, the narrative underscores the persistent challenges of acceptance and visibility that transcend time. The film elevates non-binary gender communication to an art form, emphasizing the enduring need for empathy and the dismantling of rigid binaries. This sequence serves as a testament to the power of storytelling, art, and self-expression as tools for resistance, liberation, and redefinition of identity.

6. As the relationship between Chapal da and Kumar blossomed into an idyllic romance, marked by secret hunting trips and whispered promises, their increasing neglect of responsibilities began to raise suspicions. Chapal's frequent absences from rehearsals eventually drew the attention of the manager of the Jatra troupe. Complaints from fellow performers and growing hostility within the group culminated in a confrontation, where Chapal was called out and subsequently dismissed from his position. To make matters worse, the manager demanded Chapal's pending dues before terminating his employment, delivering the decision with a shocking and degrading remark. In an act of sheer cruelty, the manager insinuated that Chapal's body, specifically his feminine appearance could be exploited like that of a prostitute, claiming that Chapal had likely done so in the past. This baseless accusation was not only deeply insulting but also revealed the extent of the societal prejudices Chapal faced as a trans individual. Far from seeking justice or understanding, Chapal was met with humiliation and outright rejection from an industry he had devoted himself to serving. The incident did not just mark the end of his career in that particular troupe; it also left an indelible emotional scar. The remark served as a brutal reminder of the discrimination and vilification faced by trans individuals, who are often reduced to stereotypes and stripped of their dignity. For Chapal, it wasn't merely the loss of his job that hurt, it was the shattering realization that his contributions and talent were overlooked, replaced instead by a dehumanizing judgment rooted in prejudice. This moment underscores the pervasive bias and lack of grace extended to marginalized individuals, even within spaces that should celebrate their artistry.

This frame underscores the intersection of professional ostracism and personal degradation faced by marginalized individuals like Chapal Bhaduri. The blossoming romance



Figure 6: Film *Aarekti Premer Golpo*- 2010 (YouTube) Access on 10.09.2025

between Chapal and Kumar, which offered a fleeting sanctuary of joy, simultaneously served as the catalyst for Chapal's growing alienation within the Jatra troupe. His frequent absences and neglect of rehearsals, born out of love and escapism, became the pretext for the troupe to unleash latent biases. This culminated in a public confrontation that not only cost Chapal his livelihood but also subjected him to an appalling degree of humiliation. The manager's derogatory remark, insinuating that Chapal's feminine appearance could be commodified, cuts to the core of the societal objectification and vilification of trans individuals. This baseless accusation reduced Chapal's identity to a stereotype, revealing the pervasive prejudice even within an artistic space that should have celebrated diversity and creativity. The insinuation that Chapal's body was exploitative or "prostituted" was a reflection of how society weaponizes trans identities, stripping them of dignity and humanity. This moment is not merely an insult; it encapsulates the structural oppression faced by non-binary individuals, where their contributions are invalidated, and their identity is weaponized against them. The deeper tragedy lies in the rejection of Chapal's artistry and dedication. Despite his undeniable talent and commitment to the Jatra, his identity became the sole metric by which he was judged. This reduction of his being to a dehumanizing caricature highlights the struggles faced by non-binary and trans individuals who are forced to navigate a society that denies them equal acknowledgment, even in the spaces they enrich. Chapal's dismissal marks a loss not only of professional stability but also of emotional security, as the troupe he had devoted himself to serving became yet another space of exclusion and hostility.

In alignment with the subject of the film, this frame reveals the systemic challenges of non-binary gender communication. Chapal's dismissal and the subsequent degradation illuminate the deeply ingrained stigmas that trans individuals must endure while navigating societal and professional landscapes. His experience mirrors the broader marginalization of non-binary identities, where the very essence of their existence is questioned, invalidated, or exploited. The frame encapsulates the emotional and professional toll of being a non-binary

individual in a society that refuses to transcend binary norms, underscoring the urgent need for empathy, representation, and structural change.

7. After losing his job and source of income, Chapal da found himself in a precarious position, with no choice but to rely on Kumar for support. The removal from the Jatra troupe, an art form he once considered his sanctuary, left him devastated and unable to recover emotionally or financially. As debt mounted and basic expenses became unmanageable, Chapal grew increasingly dependent on Kumar, a situation he deeply resented. Despite his reluctance to burden anyone, he had no alternative, and this dependence began to expose a harsher side of Kumar. Initially, Kumar offered Chapal a place in his home with his family, but his actions soon revealed a lack of regard for Chapal's dignity. In one instance, Kumar mocked Chapal for using an old, unappealing mug, remarking how someone once known for their refined taste could now settle for such mediocrity. Chapal, maintaining his pride despite his financial struggles, responded that buying a new mug on borrowed money would strip him of the little self-respect he had left. These small but cutting remarks reflected the growing imbalance in their relationship, where Kumar's support began to feel more like an obligation than an act of love. As Chapal's dependence grew, Kumar's behavior became increasingly dismissive and cruel. The love that once bonded them eroded under the weight of responsibilities and societal pressures. Chapal, already ostracized and struggling, found himself reduced to a burden in Kumar's eyes. This reached a breaking point during a particularly bitter exchange, where a despairing Chapal asked what Kumar would do if he decided to end his life. Kumar's cold response asking whether he preferred a wooden or electric cremation pyre shattered any remaining illusion of compassion. Unable to endure such disregard and disdain, Chapal made the difficult decision to leave the city and retreat to a rural area. This act symbolized his final attempt to reclaim his dignity and distance himself from a relationship that had devolved into a source of pain and humiliation. The incident underscores the harsh realities faced by marginalized individuals, who are often left to navigate both societal rejection and the emotional toll of strained personal relationships.

Forced to depend on Kumar for support, he entered a dynamic that further eroded his dignity, exposing the fragility of love when confronted with societal and economic pressures. Kumar's initial gesture of providing shelter soon gave way to condescension and indifference, reflecting the strain that dependency placed on their relationship. Kumar's remark about the old mug was emblematic of the subtle but deeply cutting ways he demeaned Chapal's identity and self-worth. For Chapal, the refusal to replace the mug symbolized his attempt to hold onto the remnants of his pride amidst mounting humiliation. These microaggressions underscored the growing power imbalance between the two, where



Figure 7: Film Arekti Premer Golpo- 2010 (YouTube) Access on 10.09.2025

Chapal's reliance on Kumar transformed love into pity and support into obligation. The escalation of this imbalance culminated in Kumar's chillingly apathetic response to Chapal's despair, a moment that laid bare the emotional void that had replaced their once-romantic bond. This interaction not only shattered Chapal's faith in their relationship but also served as a broader metaphor for the dehumanization faced by marginalized individuals. Kumar's cruel detachment reflected a societal attitude that views trans and non-binary individuals as burdens rather than as individuals deserving respect and compassion. Chapal's decision to leave the city and retreat to the countryside became a final act of self-preservation, symbolizing his determination to reclaim the dignity that urban life and personal relationships had stripped away. It was not merely an act of physical relocation but a poignant rejection of a love that had turned into a source of suffering. In choosing solitude over humiliation, Chapal asserted his agency, refusing to let his identity be further diminished by societal or relational constraints. This frame highlights the pervasive challenges faced by non-binary individuals in navigating dependency within relationships shaped by societal pressures. Chapal's story serves as a microcosm of the broader struggles of marginalized identities, illustrating how societal rejection extends beyond public spheres into the most intimate corners of life. The frame underscores the psychological toll of this dual rejection, advocating for a deeper understanding of the intersection between love, dignity, and identity in the lives of non-binary individuals.

8. As Chapal da adjusted to the monotony of rural life, a new chapter unfolded with the arrival of Tushar, a young man who worked as the manager of the local Dharamshala. Tushar, a runaway from a carpenter family, had also experienced betrayal in his past, although he kept his story guarded. Recognizing Chapal's vulnerability, Tushar offered him a place to stay, gradually becoming a significant presence in his life. While Chapal was still grappling with the emotional wounds inflicted by Kumar, a bond began to form between him and Tushar, built on their shared experiences of loss and rejection. Their chemistry grew subtly, fueled by mutual understanding and the quiet comfort of being seen by someone who knew

the pain of being outcast. This narrative of shared solace parallels events unfolding in the present-day timeline, where Abhiroop starts developing an attachment to Uday. The film masterfully mirrors these relationships, with the same actors portraying different roles in two timelines, Chapal da and Tushar in the past, and Abhiroop and Uday in the present. The parallels are striking: in both cases, individuals wounded by love find themselves in the care of someone who has also been scarred by life's cruelties. This connection creates a complex web of emotions, as both Chapal and Abhiroop navigate the fragile space between healing and vulnerability. The dual timelines underscore the universality of these themes, abandonment, acceptance, and the longing for connection. While the circumstances differ, the essence remains the same: those who have been cast aside by loved ones often find unexpected companionship with others who have faced similar struggles. The interplay between these two dimensions highlights the cyclical nature of human relationships and the enduring search for empathy and belonging, even amidst the pain of rejection.

This frame masterfully portrays the evolution of Chapal da's journey as he transitions from desolation to a fragile sense of solace. Tushar's entry into Chapal's life is not merely coincidental; it is emblematic of how shared pain has the power to foster profound human connections. As a runaway with his own unspoken scars, Tushar identifies Chapal's vulnerability and offers him shelter, an act that transcends altruism, becoming an unspoken pact of mutual recognition. Their burgeoning bond, marked by subtle gestures and unarticulated understanding, exemplifies the healing potential of companionship among the wounded. This emotional thread is paralleled in the present-day narrative, where Abhiroop begins to develop an attachment to Uday. The film's deliberate use of the same actors to portray these relationships across timelines creates a mirrored narrative, blending past and present into a singular thematic exploration. Both timelines underscore a universal truth: those battered by rejection often find sanctuary in the presence of someone who has endured similar wounds. This shared vulnerability fosters a connection that defies conventional boundaries, offering a redemptive path forward. The dual timelines work in harmony to illuminate the cyclical



Figure 8: Film Arekti Premer Golpo- 2010 (YouTube) Access on 10.09.2025

nature of human emotions and relationships. While Chapal's bond with Tushar arises from the ashes of Kumar's betrayal, Abhiroop's connection with Uday springs from her fractured dynamic with Basu. The seamless interplay between these narratives not only enriches the storytelling but also reinforces the timelessness of themes such as abandonment, resilience, and the pursuit of empathy. These parallels are a testament to the enduring human need for connection, even when faced with the relentless burden of societal alienation.

From the perspective of non-binary gender communication, this frame offers a profound commentary on the universality of emotional bonds that transcend gender and societal norms. Chapal and Tushar's relationship, like that of Abhiroop and Uday, exists in a liminal space, unbound by traditional categorizations of romance or friendship. This ambiguity becomes a radical act of resistance, challenging the rigid constructs that often dictate interpersonal relationships. By presenting these bonds as fluid and multifaceted, the film subverts conventional narratives, creating a discourse that prioritizes empathy and shared humanity over binary definitions. It is through these relationships, born of mutual understanding and solidarity, that they navigate the societal and emotional minefields imposed upon them. The film's parallel timelines amplify this theme, emphasizing that while the struggles of marginalized identities persist across generations, so too does the capacity for healing and renewal through meaningful human bonds.

9. Just as life seemed to be finding a rhythm for both Chapal and Tushar, fate dealt an unexpected blow. Four years later, Kumar tracked Chapal down and traveled all the way to the rural area where he had settled. At first, it seemed like an emotional reunion, like a chance to make amends with a lost love and perhaps rebuild what had been torn apart. But this anticipated moment of reconciliation quickly turned into an ironic twist, one that Chapal wasn't prepared for. Kumar explained that his wife had developed neurological health issues and had asked him to return home to care for the household. The narrative seemed sincere, and Chapal, feeling a sense of obligation and longing, agreed to go back with him. However, what Chapal didn't realize was that this decision would lead him into a future fraught with uncertainties and hidden motives. Tushar, however, was not at all happy with Chapal's choice to leave. He expressed his anger and disappointment, accusing Chapal of being nothing more than a prostitute, willing to return to a toxic situation where he would once again be dependent on someone else. Tushar's words stung, as they echoed the very criticisms Chapal had tried to distance himself from. In his earlier life, Chapal had preached about not needing anyone to survive, yet here he was, returning to an unknown and potentially damaging situation. This contradiction made Chapal question his own decisions and self-worth. The tension between his desires for acceptance and the reality

of his choices underscored the complexity of his journey, a journey that, despite moments of healing, was still haunted by the weight of dependency and societal expectations.

This frame captures a pivotal moment of emotional upheaval and moral conflict, meticulously unraveling the intricate dynamics of love, dependency, and self-preservation within the non-binary experience. The unexpected return of Kumar, veiled under the pretense of remorse and responsibility, destabilizes the fragile equilibrium Chapal had achieved in his rural retreat with Tushar. Kumar's plea, ostensibly driven by his wife's deteriorating neurological condition and the resulting household demands, appeals to Chapal's unresolved emotional ties and latent sense of obligation. What initially appears to be an opportunity for reconciliation soon reveals itself as a harbinger of compromise and potential exploitation. Chapal's decision to accompany Kumar stems from a complex interplay of longing and hope, tinged with an undercurrent of naivety. However, this choice does not come without consequences, as Tushar reacts with unrestrained fury, branding Chapal as a "prostitute" willing to forfeit his dignity for a semblance of acceptance. Tushar's incendiary accusation, while cruel, forces Chapal to confront the contradictions embedded in his choices. It becomes a stark reminder of the precariousness of his existence; a life perpetually caught between the pursuit of emotional fulfillment and the struggle for self-respect. From the lens of non-binary gender communication, this moment encapsulates the enduring societal stigmatization that ensnares individuals like Chapal. His return to Kumar is not merely an act of emotional weakness but a reflection of the societal and relational dynamics that often compel marginalized individuals to make decisions at odds with their sense of self-worth. Kumar's apparent overture of reconciliation is undercut by a latent exploitation of Chapal's vulnerability, underscoring the conditional and transactional nature of relationships shaped by power imbalances and societal prejudices.

Tushar's reaction, though ostensibly borne out of betrayal, further amplifies this theme. His words, dripping with judgment, serve as a microcosm of the societal tendency to reduce Chapal's identity to one of dependency and moral compromise. Rather than offering solidarity or



Figure 9: Film *Arekti Premer Golpo*- 2010 (YouTube) Access on 10.09.2025

empathy, Tushar weaponizes societal biases against Chapal, echoing the systemic dehumanization faced by non-binary individuals. This confrontation reveals the deep fractures within relationships forged in the margins, where shared experiences of exclusion do not necessarily preclude internalized prejudice or cruelty. In its broader narrative context, the scene serves as a poignant commentary on the cyclical struggles of non-binary individuals across time and space. Just as Chapal grapples with Kumar's manipulative return, Abhiroop's parallel journey in the present timeline mirrors the enduring quest for validation and belonging. The dual narrative structure of the film reinforces the timeless nature of these challenges, revealing how the interplay of love, survival, and societal rejection persists across generations. Ultimately, this frame is a masterclass in exploring the duality of human relationships for marginalized individuals. It lays bare the precarious balance between vulnerability and agency, revealing how the longing for connection often comes at the cost of personal dignity in a world that systematically denies acceptance. Through its layered storytelling, the film transcends the personal to interrogate the universal, offering a searing indictment of the societal structures that perpetuate these cycles of pain and compromise.

10. As the tension in the past builds symbolized by the boiling soup, the film abruptly shifts to the future, where a new dynamic unfolds. In this timeline, Uday's increasing closeness to Abhiroop starts to unsettle Basu. This reaction isn't entirely unexpected, given that Basu and Abhiroop are in a relationship, but it also highlights a deeper conflict. Basu is not only married to someone else, but he is also trapped by his fear of publicly acknowledging his affair with Abhiroop, afraid of the consequences and the judgment of society. Abhiroop, frustrated with Basu's hesitations and contradictions, boldly asks, "Who are you fooling? Yourself, your wife, or me?" This question cuts to the core of the growing emotional divide between them. While Basu is struggling to gain validation from the world around him, unable to reconcile his identity with societal expectations, Uday offers a stark contrast. Uday, with no similar history or baggage, embraces Abhiroop for who she truly is. He encourages her to break free from societal constraints suggesting she cut her hair, change her style, and live authentically without fear of judgment. Unlike Basu, who is burdened by the weight of hiding their love and maintaining appearances, Uday openly expresses his love and admiration, offering Abhiroop a taste of the independence she craves. This contrast between Basu and Uday emphasizes the complexity of Abhiroop's journey. While Basu remains entangled in the norms and expectations of society, Uday offers a path of freedom and self-expression. The growing disparities between Basu and Uday reflect the internal struggle Abhiroop faces, caught between the security of a relationship shaped by secrecy and the allure of a love that encourages her to embrace her true self, without fear or shame.



Figure 10: Film Arekti Premer Golpo- 2010 (YouTube) Access on 10.09.2025

When, Uday's burgeoning closeness to Abhiroop begins to unsettle Basu, exposing the fragility of their already tenuous relationship, it also sheds light on deeper fractures within his psyche. Basu is not only married but remains ensnared by an oppressive fear of societal judgment, perpetually unwilling to fully embrace his love for Abhiroop in the public sphere. This internal conflict culminates in a moment of piercing clarity when Abhiroop, wearied by Basu's duplicity, challenges him with an incisive confrontation that strikes at the very core of their emotional impasse. Basu's life is defined by contradictions, on one hand, he craves validation from a society that would ostracize him if the truth were revealed; on the other, he remains tethered to Abhiroop in a clandestine relationship that erodes under the weight of his fears. His inability to reconcile these opposing forces not only strains their bond but also leaves Abhiroop questioning her place in his life.

In sharp contrast, Uday emerges as an agent of liberation and authenticity. Unburdened by the shadows of societal expectations or a history steeped in duplicity, Uday offers Abhiroop unconditional acceptance. His love is free of the contingencies that define Basu's affection. He urges Abhiroop to shed the layers of conformity she has accumulated over time, encouraging her to cut her hair, redefine her style, and live unabashedly in her truth. Uday's openness and courage serve as a beacon, illuminating an alternative path for Abhiroop, one where love and identity are not constrained by fear or shame but are celebrated for their authenticity. The juxtaposition between Basu and Uday underscores the thematic complexity of Abhiroop's journey. Basu, mired in self-deception and societal entanglements, represents the safety of familiarity but also the suffocating limitations of a love that cannot flourish in the light of day. Uday, on the other hand, embodies the promise of liberation, a love that champions self-expression and embraces vulnerability without the oppressive weight of societal judgment. This dichotomy mirrors Abhiroop's internal struggle: should she remain ensnared in the covert and conditional security offered by Basu, or should she venture into the uncharted territory of freedom and authenticity with Uday? The narrative poignantly captures this existential crossroads, where the tension between societal acceptance and personal fulfillment reaches a crescendo. Through this layered exploration, the film

masterfully interrogates the universal longing for love and self-actualization, challenging the audience to reconsider the boundaries imposed by convention and the sacrifices demanded by authenticity.

11. As the intricate web of emotions and relationships reached a breaking point, Basu's wife, Rani, made an unanticipated arrival on set. Oblivious to her husband's clandestine affair, Rani secure in the belief that she shared a contented marriage with a bisexual man, was on the cusp of an earth-shattering revelation. Her arrival, intended to be a joyous surprise, swiftly unraveled into a confrontation with truths she was ill-prepared to face. Guided by an assistant carrying her luggage, Rani was inadvertently led to the room where Basu and Abhiroop had been staying together. Her entrance, though unintentional, proved pivotal. A mere glance around the room was enough for her instincts, her finely attuned "women's intuition" to detect an unsettling undercurrent. This intuition crystallized into certainty when she discovered a photograph on the dressing table, capturing an unmistakably intimate moment between Basu and Abhiroop. The revelation, though silent, was deafening. Without creating a scene, Rani composed herself and left the room, her suspicions confirmed and her composure masking the emotional tempest within. The tension simmered through the day and culminated at lunch, where the atmosphere grew unbearably charged as Rani and Abhiroop came face-to-face in Basu's presence. Their earlier polite greetings now carried the weight of unsaid truths and unspoken rivalries. Between Rani, whose societal role as a wife and expectant mother afforded her validation and authority, and Abhiroop, a non-binary individual battling the relentless marginalization of their identity, the room became a battleground of competing claims on love, legitimacy, and acceptance.

In a stunning display of poise and control, Rani shattered the silence with a seemingly innocuous question, asking Abhiroop for baby name suggestions. Her composed exterior belied the storm raging beneath, a calm veneer carefully maintained to assert dominance without direct confrontation. However, what followed was a revelation that irrevocably shifted the balance of power. With calculated precision, Rani announced that she was pregnant, delivering the news with a deliberate air of triumph as she revealed that her visit was intended to surprise Basu with this joyous development. What should have been a moment of celebration landed with the force of a crushing blow for Abhiroop. The announcement, steeped in societal weight and legitimacy, underscored the insurmountable divide between them. For Rani, the news was a declaration of her unassailable position in Basu's life, an affirmation of her role as his wife and the mother of his child. For Abhiroop, it was the cruel reminder of a love rendered invisible and invalid by societal conventions. Yet, in an extraordinary act of resilience and grace, Abhiroop managed to mask her



Figure 11: Film *Arekti Premer Golpo*- 2010 (YouTube) Access on 10.09.2025

heartbreak. Offering warm congratulations and engaging with Rani's remarks, Abhiroop concealed the devastation that threatened to consume her, a testament to her inner strength and unyielding dignity. This confrontation served as a microcosm of the film's broader themes, highlighting the stark dichotomy between Rani and Abhiroop. Rani, the embodiment of societal conformity and sanctioned love, wielded her status as a shield and weapon. Abhiroop, conversely, symbolized the defiant yet vulnerable spirit of a love that exists outside the bounds of convention, constantly striving for acknowledgment in a world that denies its legitimacy. The moment also accentuated the fragility of Basu, caught between two worlds yet incapable of reconciling the conflicting demands of his heart and society. Ultimately, the scene was a masterful exploration of power dynamics, identity, and the silent wars waged within relationships. It exposed the multifaceted struggles of marginalized individuals like Abhiroop, whose capacity for resilience and composure in the face of societal erasure illuminated a profound and universal truth: love, while powerful, is often at the mercy of the world's unforgiving gaze.

12. As the narrative slows, the focus shifts to quieter yet profound moments of connection and confrontation. Roop and Uday immerse themselves in the subtleties of their growing bond, exploring the silent yet potent language of intimacy. Meanwhile, elsewhere on set, over a glass of wine, Momo, the assistant coordinator, and Basu engage in a candid exchange, reflecting on the chaos that has unfolded. Their conversation takes a provocative turn when Momo critiques Abhiroop's filmmaking approach with piercing candor. "Don't call it an autobiography," she declares. "You're just a storyteller seducing the audience with a forbidden love story." Her words cut sharply, questioning the authenticity of Abhiroop's intentions. She doesn't stop there. Momo observes that simply adorning oneself with symbols of rebellion like kajal doesn't inherently signify fearlessness or liberation. Her final remark lands with unsettling force: "I think Abhi-da is as closeted as Chapal da, deep down, and is using Chapal da's story as a pretext to tell her own." Basu, unwavering in his loyalty to Abhiroop, immediately comes to her defense. He asserts that while Abhiroop may be many things, a coward is not one of them. Yet Momo's provocation lingers like an echo, forcing an



Figure 12: Film Arekti Premer Golpo- 2010 (YouTube) Access on 10.09.2025

unspoken question to surface: Is Abhiroop truly amplifying Chapal Bhaduri's story, or is she subconsciously projecting her own struggles onto the narrative?

This confrontation seamlessly aligns with the overarching theme of the film: non-binary gender communication through storytelling. The film itself serves as a layered exploration of how art becomes a conduit for expressing marginalized identities, where the boundaries between the subject and the storyteller blur. Abhiroop's project mirrors the duality of non-binary existence, a space of negotiation between the personal and the collective, the private and the public. Momo's incisive critique drives home the film's central premise: that identity, particularly one existing outside the binary, is a complex interplay of self-perception, societal judgment, and personal reconciliation. Just as Chapal da's life becomes a vessel for examining the struggles of a trans woman in a deeply patriarchal society, Abhiroop's film becomes a mirror, reflecting her own journey of self-discovery and defiance. By questioning Abhiroop's motivations, the scene underscores the challenges of using art to navigate and communicate non-binary identities. It highlights how, for individuals existing on the fringes of societal norms, storytelling is rarely just storytelling, it is an act of survival, self-definition, and advocacy. Through this exchange, the film invites viewers to grapple with the fluid boundaries of truth, art, and identity, reinforcing its commitment to exploring the nuances of non-binary gender communication.

13. The narrative shifts once again to the past, seamlessly blending timelines as Momo from the present takes on the identity of Sheela in the past—a tenant at Kumar's house. Sheela, a bold and unapologetically sensual woman, embodies the archetype of a struggling, low-key actress with a provocative style and an uninhibited attitude. Her arrival in Kumar's household stirs tension and adds layers of complexity, exposing the cyclical exploitation of women and marginalized identities by men who view relationships as transactional and discardable. Sheela's introduction highlights a grim reality: the recurring exploitation faced by women and trans individuals across generations. Kumar epitomizes this exploitative behavior. Having married Gopa, he soon grew

weary of the responsibilities of family life, emotionally abandoning her to pursue an affair with Chapal. When that relationship became burdensome, Kumar cast Chapal aside, only to later manipulate him into becoming a caregiver under the pretense of rekindled partnership when Gopa fell ill. Kumar's treatment of Chapal erases his identity, denying him dignity and reducing him to a mere tool for convenience. This erasure becomes painfully evident when Sheela, curious about Chapal's role in the household, receives a chillingly dismissive response from Kumar: he refers to Chapal as nothing more than "household help for 20 years" before slamming the door. The callousness of this act reveals Kumar's true character and underscores the societal norms that enable such dehumanization.

Sheela herself becomes another pawn in Kumar's manipulative schemes. Despite her confident exterior, she is no exception to his pattern of transactional relationships. Chapal, who has endured years of emotional manipulation, attempts to hold Kumar accountable. In one poignant moment, Chapal confronts Kumar for forgetting his own son's birthday, pointedly remarking that it reflects poorly on a father when his child witnesses him locking the door with another woman on such a special day. This confrontation, however, devolves into a blame game, with Kumar once again evading accountability and deflecting his failures onto others. Sheela's audacious nature soon takes an uncomfortable turn when she addresses Kumar's sexual disinterest in her advances. She boldly speculates about his past relationships, including his intimacy with Chapal, and insinuates that he might suffer from sexual dysfunction or illness. These invasive and insensitive remarks echo the societal tendency to pry into and judge the private lives of queer and trans individuals. Sheela even perpetuates harmful stereotypes, suggesting that Chapal's identity and his history in the performing arts may have exposed him to such "sickness." These accusations deeply wound Chapal, compounding the years of marginalization, rejection, and emotional abuse he has already endured. The scene starkly illustrates the stigma and vilification faced by trans and queer individuals, who are frequently subjected to baseless assumptions and cruel judgments. This moment adds yet another layer of emotional trauma to Chapal's existence, highlighting the societal prejudice



Figure 13: Film Arekti Premer Golpo- 2010 (YouTube) Access on 10.09.2025

that silences and isolates marginalized identities. Through this interaction, the film reiterates its central theme of non-binary gender communication, showcasing how deeply entrenched biases perpetuate cycles of exploitation and erasure. Chapal's quiet endurance, born from a lack of viable alternatives, reflects the painful reality faced by those living outside societal norms. The scene becomes a harrowing depiction of resilience amidst a world that offers little room for acceptance, forcing the audience to confront the broader societal structures that sustain such injustices.

14. The night before their departure, a tense yet deeply emotional moment unfolds between Rani and Abhiroop. Rani, with tear-streaked and swollen eyes, arrives at Abhiroop's room, visibly troubled. Her demeanor catches Abhiroop's attention, prompting him to gently inquire about her distress. What follows is a confrontation steeped in vulnerability and raw honesty.

Rani admits to feeling a deep sense of envy and inadequacy. She knows, at her core, how profoundly Basu loves Abhiroop, and this acknowledgment tears at her. She confesses that Basu is incapable of balancing the two relationships, one with her, his wife, and the other with Abhiroop—especially now that he is on the brink of fatherhood. Rani, with the grace of someone who understands her obligations as a wife and soon-to-be mother, expresses her intent to take Basu away. Her resolve isn't rooted in anger or vengeance but in a quiet desperation to preserve their family and secure a future for her child. This moment of confrontation takes a piteous turn when Abhiroop poses a simple yet powerful question: "If I were a woman, would you have reacted this same way?" This question slices through the conversation like a blade, confronting the pervasive undercurrent of discrimination that frames every interaction Abhiroop faces. It challenges Rani to reflect on whether her opposition stems from her husband's infidelity or from Abhiroop's identity as a trans woman.

This exchange highlights the societal biases and prejudices that non-binary and trans individuals endure daily. The subtle discrimination embedded in each word, glance, and action becomes a recurring motif throughout the narrative. Here, it underscores the pervasive double standards and the deeply ingrained discomfort society feels toward relationships that don't conform to traditional norms. Rani's struggle is a microcosm of the larger societal conflict, a world that demands conformity yet punishes authenticity. This scene aligns seamlessly well with the subject of this paper through the duality of acceptance and rejection. It highlights how societal structures reduce identities like Abhiroop's to a state of "otherness," perpetuating isolation and misunderstanding. The moment is not merely a personal reckoning for Rani and Abhiroop but serves as a broader reflection of the silent battles waged by countless marginalized individuals. It compels the audience to interrogate their own biases,



Figure 14: Film *Arekti Premer Golpo*- 2010 (YouTube) Access on 10.09.2025

making it a powerful call for empathy and understanding in the face of deeply ingrained prejudice. It sheds light on how their love, their humanity, and their right to exist freely are constantly questioned, making this a powerful moment of introspection for the audience.

15. As the journey nears its conclusion and the crew prepares to leave, Chapal receives an unexpected letter that evokes the weight of his past. The envelope bears the name "Gopa," a poignant reminder of the intricate and agonizing bond they shared. Though their lives seemed vastly different, Chapal and Gopa were inextricably linked by Kumar, a man who exploited and betrayed them both. Their shared suffering, wrought by the same person and the oppressive societal norms that defined their lives, created an unspoken connection that transcended their differences. Gopa, neurologically fragile and trapped in her circumstances, found solace in Chapal's presence. Together, they forged an unlikely yet profound friendship. Their relationship was not defined by bitterness over their shared history with Kumar but by a mutual understanding of pain and resilience. In each other, they found rare moments of refuge and fleeting joy, an extraordinary bond formed in the shadow of betrayal and societal rejection. Their friendship stood as a testament to the strength of the human spirit, capable of finding light even in the darkest corners of existence. In her letter, Gopa reflects on this connection, celebrating the empathy and camaraderie they shared. She expresses gratitude for Chapal's companionship during her most vulnerable moments and acknowledges the courage it took for both of them to endure the cruelties inflicted by others and the world around them. Her words are both a tribute to their friendship and a plea to Chapal for something greater, a plea for truth.

Having learned that someone is creating an autobiography of Chapal's life, Gopa urges him to tell his story with complete honesty. She implores him to strip away the masks he was forced to wear, to abandon the lies he told to survive, and to embrace the truth of his identity without shame or compromise. In her heartfelt plea, she writes: "Every day of your life, you hid your true character. You couldn't express who you truly were, but now it's time. This is your story. Say everything, no lies,



Figure 15 : Film Arekti Premer Golpo- 2010 (YouTube) Access on 10.09.2025

no hiding, because this is your biography.” Gopa’s letter becomes a pivotal moment in Chapal’s journey. It is more than a farewell from an old friend—it is a call to reclaim his voice and identity. Her words encourage him to transform his pain into purpose, to let his story stand as a testament to the resilience of those marginalized by society. It is an invitation to confront the oppressive norms that sought to erase him and to use his truth as a beacon for others who, like him, have been silenced and ostracized. This scene aligns seamlessly with the film’s central subject non-binary gender communication through the lens of Chapal’s life and struggles. The letter encapsulates the essence of self-expression, the fight for authenticity, and the resilience required to confront societal prejudice. It underscores the film’s exploration of how stories, especially those of marginalized individuals, can serve as acts of defiance against oppressive norms and as sources of hope for others. Gopa’s plea reinforces the narrative’s central theme: the transformative power of owning one’s truth. It highlights how storytelling can become a tool for reclaiming identity, challenging societal norms, and finding liberation. This poignant moment bridges the personal and the universal, as Chapal’s story becomes not just his own but a shared testament to the struggles and triumphs of those who refuse to be silenced.

Mythology as Metaphor: Exploring Androgyny and Fluidity

Rituparno Ghosh’s *Arekti Premer Golpo* (Megh Peoner Bag, 2024) intertwines mythological symbolism with the personal narratives of its queer protagonists, crafting a poignant exploration of gender fluidity, love, and societal rejection. The film’s narrative is deeply rooted in mythological frameworks, particularly Vaishnavism and the figure of Ardhanarishwar, which serve as metaphors to examine the struggles of identity and acceptance faced by transgender and queer individuals. The story follows Abhiroop Sen, a transgender documentary filmmaker from Delhi (played by Ghosh), who visits Kolkata to document the life of Chapal Bhaduri, a Jatra performer famous for portraying female roles on stage during an era when women were prohibited from performing. As Abhiroop delves into Chapal’s life, the parallels between their experiences become evident. Both Abhiroop and

Chapal endure emotional and physical exploitation in their relationships—Chapal with Kumar and Abhiroop with Basu, a bisexual cinematographer married to Rani. Ultimately, both protagonists are abandoned by their lovers, left to grapple with rejection and isolation.

Mythological Framework: Vaishnavism and Androgyny

At its core, the film employs the mythological structure of Vaishnavism, particularly the Radha-Krishna narrative, to reflect the dynamics of love and separation within queer relationships. The title, *Arekti Premer Golpo* (Another Love Story) (Megh Peoner Bag, 2024), subtly invokes the idea of divine love stories commonly associated with Radha-Krishna, Ram-Sita, or Shiva-Parvati. However, unlike these idealized unions, the film emphasizes the pain and isolation of unfulfilled love, mirroring Radha’s eternal longing for Krishna after his departure.

The myth of Ardhanarishwar—a composite deity symbolizing the union of masculine and feminine energies—serves as a profound metaphor for the fluid identities of the protagonists. Abhiroop’s name itself signifies multiple facets of identity, aligning with the concept of Ardhanarishwar. While Chapal identifies with a feminine role, likening himself to a woman trapped in a man’s body, Abhiroop rejects the binary altogether, embracing a “thirdness” that disrupts traditional notions of gender. This distinction is underscored in a conversation between the two:

Abhiroop

“Do you think of yourself as a woman, Chapal-da?”

Chapal

“If I thought of myself as a man, all my troubles would have ended.”

Abhiroop

“No, I don’t think I’m a woman or a man. I think we are separate.”

Abhiroop’s rejection of binary categories resonates with the androgynous figure of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, a central figure in Gaudiya Vaishnavism who embodies the unity of Radha and Krishna. This connection is visually reinforced when Abhiroop shaves his head, rejecting the wig that symbolizes conformity to traditional femininity, and resembling the ascetic image of Chaitanya. In contrast, Chapal’s long hair reflects his embrace of femininity, aligning him with traditional depictions of Radha.

Mythological Love Triangles: Radha-Krishna-Rukmini

The Radha-Krishna mythology also manifests in the depiction of love triangles, reinterpreted through a queer lens. In the film, Abhiroop embodies Radha, the devoted yet unfulfilled lover, while Basu represents Krishna, caught between his affection for Abhiroop

and his responsibilities to his wife, Rani, who parallels Rukmini. This dynamic reflects the eternal tension in the Radha-Krishna-Rukmini triangle, where Krishna's earthly obligations to Rukmini prevent him from fully embracing Radha's love. A pivotal moment in the film occurs when Abhiroop asks Basu whether he would accompany him to an event if it coincided with Rani's dinner plans. Basu's silence encapsulates the internal conflict of a bisexual man torn between his lover and his wife, mirroring Krishna's struggle to balance his divine love for Radha with his worldly commitments to Rukmini. The climax of the film, where Basu kisses Abhiroop before leaving with Rani, evokes the mythological narrative of Krishna's departure from Radha, leaving her in eternal longing.

Androgyny and Divine Unity

The mythological undercurrents of *Arekti Premer Golpo* (Megh Peoner Bag, 2024) extend beyond individual relationships to explore the broader theme of androgyny and divine unity. Abhiroop's identity as a third gender reflects the divine union of masculine and feminine energies embodied by Ardhanarishwar and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. The film's subtle references to Chaitanya's androgyny, such as Abhiroop's interaction with a peacock feather—a symbol of Krishna's eternal love—underscore this connection. The recurring Vaishnavite song, "Bonomali Tumi," further emphasizes the spiritual longing and transcendence associated with Radha-Krishna's love.

Mythological Lens on Queer Isolation

While Abhiroop and Chapal share a sense of identity and victimization, their stories also diverge in significant ways. Chapal, who conforms to a feminine role, becomes a mistress-slave in Kumar's household, embodying the exploitation and objectification of women in patriarchal systems. In contrast, Abhiroop, who rejects gender binaries, experiences a different form of isolation, rooted in society's inability to accommodate identities outside the male-female spectrum. This distinction highlights the varied experiences of queer individuals within heteronormative structures, even as both protagonists face rejection and loneliness. By juxtaposing personal narratives with mythological symbolism, *Arekti Premer Golpo* (Megh Peoner Bag, 2024) elevates the struggles of its queer protagonists to a universal plane, urging audiences to reconsider their preconceived notions of love, gender, and identity. The film's invocation of Vaishnavism and Ardhanarishwar not only provides a rich metaphorical framework but also challenges societal norms, advocating for a broader acceptance of fluidity and diversity.

Cross-Dressing: A Medium of Expression, Resistance, and Queer Identity in Bengali Cinema

The practice of cross-dressing has deep roots in Indian mythology, culture, and spirituality, dating back to representations in epics like *The Mahabharata* and texts

such as the Puranas and Upanishads. Characters like Arjuna, Shikhandini, and Shambhara demonstrate how cross-dressing was often used for disguise, protection, or expressing one's identity. In Hindu mythology, cross-dressing and gender fluidity were also central to rituals like Shakti worship and Tantric practices. Moreover, the cult of *Sakhibhava*—which posits that Krishna is the sole male entity and all other beings are feminine devotees existing to please him—further emphasized the transcendence of binary gender norms. Historically, the Bhakti movement brought cross-dressing into cultural discourse through figures like Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Revered as a reformer of modern Hinduism, Chaitanya often dressed as Radha to embody the spiritual union with Krishna. This act, rooted in mythological traditions, was both an expression of devotion and an assertion of gender fluidity in a patriarchal society. Similarly, mythological tales like Vishnu's transformation into Mohini to save the *devas* from Bhasmasur or into Krishnakali to resolve community conflicts highlight the sociopolitical dimensions of cross-dressing as a tool for protection and community cohesion.

In medieval Bengal, devotional songs and stories about androgynous or transformative deities played a crucial role in uniting the Shaiva-Shakta and Vaishnava sects. Narratives like those of Chitrangada and Chudala, where individuals transform between male and female identities, also underscore the practice of cross-dressing as a way of embracing fluid gender identities based on circumstance or personal convenience. This cultural tradition of transformation reflects not just spiritual ideas but also anthropological understandings of human evolution and adaptive practices. Clothing, originally designed for protection from environmental elements, evolved into a tool for social categorization, including gender identity. Globally, cross-dressing has been integral to cultural practices in ancient Greek, Chinese and Norse societies. However, in the Bengali context, cross-dressing gains new meaning in contemporary cinema, particularly in the 2010 film *Arekti Premer Golpo* (Just Another Love Story), directed by Kaushik Ganguly and starring Rituparno Ghosh. The film, starring Ghosh as Abhiroop Sen—a transgender filmmaker—explores themes of gender fluidity, societal rejection, and love outside the heteronormative framework. It parallels Abhiroop's life with that of Chapal Bhaduri, a celebrated Jatra performer renowned for playing female roles in an era when women were barred from acting on stage.

Indian Audience: Queer Portrayals and their Cultural Significance

One of the first popular Bengali films to highlight queer identities is *Arekti Premer Golpo* (2010), especially since it features a non-binary/trans feminine character. Indian viewers may see these depictions via a variety of cultural prisms influenced by regional cinematic traditions,



changing LGBT visibility, and long-standing societal conventions. For many viewers, the film's depiction of non-binary gender challenges heteronormative expectations, inviting audiences to engage with identities that have often remained marginalized or stereotyped in Indian media (Gopinath, 2005). Gender fluidity is situated within both current and traditional cultural settings through the film's interwoven storyline, which contrasts a modern gay filmmaker with the historical figure of Chapal Bhaduri. By rooting queer expression in identifiable cultural histories, this relationship can connect with Indian audiences who are familiar with indigenous gender-variant cultures like the hijra or female impersonators in jatra theatre (Reddy, 2005). As a result, the movie may be seen as a component of India's own intricate gender traditions rather than just as an LGBTQ+ story with Western influences.

However, reactions could also differ based on societal views in the area. Due to prevalent ideas of binary gender and family honour, more conservative viewers could feel uneasy, even while urban audiences might value the film's nuanced portrayal and its critique of societal stigma (Dutta & Roy, 2014). Viewers are prompted to reevaluate presumptions regarding gender identity and validity by the film's intimate depiction of queer desire and emotional fragility, which upends traditional cinematic depictions. *Arekti Premer Golpo* has cultural relevance since it presents non-binary identification as a lived reality as opposed to a symbolic or humorous cliché. Its multi-layered story challenges Indian viewers to acknowledge queer subjectivity as an essential component of the country's cultural and cinematic environment and to face long-standing prejudices.

Cross-Dressing in Cinema: Between Expression and Resistance

Arekti Premer Golpo (Megh Peoner Bag, 2024) intricately weaves together the past and present through a periodical narrative. Using the same actors for both timelines—Rituparno Ghosh as Abhiroop and young Chapal, and Indraneil Sengupta as Abhiroop's bisexual partner and Chapal's lover Kumar—the film draws parallels between the psychological struggles of its protagonists. Chapal's cross-dressing for jatra performances reflects an extension of his desire, confined by societal norms, whereas Abhiroop's cross-dressing transcends traditional expectations, enabling him to express his identity with more freedom and confidence. Chapal's identity as "Chapal Rani" was celebrated on stage but constrained in personal life, limited by societal perceptions and exploitation. In contrast, Abhiroop, empowered by education and economic privilege, occupies a position of relative agency within a globalized queer consumer lifestyle, shaped by the liberalization of India's economy. This stark contrast is evident in their clothing and accessories, which reflect their respective socio-economic standings. However, both characters confront prejudice and rejection, illustrating

how cross-dressing challenges heteronormative societal structures and invites resistance. The film also underscores the broader social implications of cross-dressing, linking it to homophobia and the stigmatization of queer identities. Abhiroop's struggles to release the documentary on Chapal parallel Rituparno Ghosh's personal experiences of moral policing and societal control during the film's release. The metanarrative blurs the boundaries between the characters' fictional lives and the real-life challenges of the actors, particularly Ghosh, whose own cross-dressing became a political statement and a tool for reclaiming agency.

Queer Politics in Bengali Cinema: Beyond Stereotypes

Cross-dressing in *Arekti Premer Golpo* (Megh Peoner Bag, 2024) goes beyond mere performative mimicry; it becomes a profound statement of identity and resistance. The psychological anguish of the characters is intricately tied to their experiences of cross-dressing. For Chapal, cross-dressing was both a necessity and a form of artistic expression, while for Abhiroop, it symbolized liberation and defiance against societal norms. By aligning cross-dressing with queer politics, the film challenges stereotypical notions and opens up conversations about fluid gender identities in a hegemonic society. The depiction of cross-dressing also invites reflection on the intersection of class, privilege, and queerness. While Abhiroop's privilege allows him to navigate societal prejudice with relative ease, Chapal's struggles reveal the limitations imposed on those from less empowered backgrounds. Yet, both characters face societal rejection, highlighting the pervasive nature of homophobia and transphobia across different strata. Rituparno Ghosh's personal identity and politics resonate strongly in *Arekti Premer Golpo* (Megh Peoner Bag, 2024). His cross-dressing, both within and beyond the film, challenged societal norms and became an emblem of resistance. By reclaiming cross-dressing as a cultural habit and a political act, Ghosh dismantled the ridiculing stereotypes often associated with it, transforming it into a platform for dialogue and acceptance in a conservative society.

Bengali Theatre's Influences: Non-Binary Representation in the Film

To create and convey non-binary identities, Kaushik Ganguly's 2010 film *Arekti Premer Golpo* heavily references Bengali theatre traditions. Bengali theatre has long supported performative fluidity, cross-dressing, and socially transgressive characters, especially in jatra and twentieth-century group theatre. This has created a cultural space where gender expression may be explored outside conventional norms (Bhaumik, 2013). Through its parallel story of the renowned jatra actor Chapal Bhaduri, who is renowned for playing female parts on stage, the movie transmits this history. By chronicling Chapal's

experiences, the movie shows how gender nonconformity was first observed in Bengali culture through theatrical performance, even if it was limited to the performance's aesthetics (Dasgupta, 2017). The film's portrayal of non-binary subjectivity is also influenced by Bengali group theater's focus on social critique and realism. Using a restrained, naturalistic approach evocative of group theatre techniques, the film highlights the emotional and psychological complexity of the characters—both Chapal and the modern filmmaker Abhiroop (Ganguly, 2012). Because of this theatrical impact, the story can depict non-binary identification as a lived experience rooted in daily struggles with desire, stigma, and selfhood rather than as a show. *Arekti Premer Golpo* also used theatre as a metaphor for gender performance in general. The movie highlights how gender roles and stage roles are created, practiced, and socially controlled, drawing on Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity (Butler, 1990). The video illustrates a spectrum of non-binary expression influenced by the aesthetics, politics, and histories of Bengali theatre by contrasting Chapal's theatrical background with Abhiroop's current challenges. Therefore, Bengali theatre serves as a formative cultural context as well as a backdrop for the film's articulation of non-binary identity, visibility, and resistance.

CONCLUSION

Kaushik Ganguly's *Arekti Premer Golpo* (Megh Peoner Bag, 2024) is not merely a cinematic exploration of queer identities but a profound commentary on the complexities of love, gender, and societal acceptance. Through its layered narrative that juxtaposes the lives of Abhiroop Sen and Chapal Bhaduri, the film weaves a compelling tale of personal struggles and collective resistance against the rigid norms of heteronormative society. It draws attention to the deep psychological anguish experienced by those who dare to exist beyond the binary framework of gender, while also celebrating their courage to reclaim their identities in the face of adversity. The film's portrayal of cross-dressing transcends its superficial association with mimicry or theatricality, using it instead as a powerful tool for self-expression, cultural critique, and political resistance. In Chapal Bhaduri's performances, cross-dressing reflects an artistic necessity dictated by societal constraints, while for Abhiroop Sen, it symbolizes a deeper, more defiant assertion of his fluid identity. This duality underscores the evolving nature of queer expression, shaped by personal, historical, and socio-economic factors.

What sets *Arekti Premer Golpo* (Megh Peoner Bag, 2024) apart is its ability to connect the personal with the political. It blurs the boundaries between art and reality, as Rituparno Ghosh's portrayal of Abhiroop Sen mirrors his own life as a queer filmmaker challenging societal norms. This metanarrative not only humanizes the struggles of its characters but also invites viewers to question their own

perceptions of gender and identity. The film's critique of societal hypocrisy and moral policing remains relevant, offering a bold statement about the necessity of acceptance and inclusivity.

The message of the film is both poignant and universal: the journey to self-acceptance is fraught with challenges, but it is also one of the most profound acts of resistance against societal oppression. By embracing their authentic selves, individuals like Abhiroop and Chapal redefine the meaning of love and identity, challenging the rigid structures that seek to confine them. Ultimately, *Arekti Premer Golpo* (Megh Peoner Bag, 2024) is a tribute to the resilience of queer individuals, a celebration of their artistry, and a call for society to embrace diversity in all its forms. It reminds us that true progress lies in dismantling stereotypes, fostering dialogue, and creating spaces where every individual, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation, can live with dignity and pride. The film leaves a lasting impression as a masterpiece of queer storytelling in Indian cinema, offering hope for a future where love and identity are celebrated in all their fluidity and complexity.

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