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Identity Crisis and Trauma in Male Same-Sex Relationships in India: Reading Kaushik Ganguly's *Just Another Love Story*or *Arekti Premer Golpo*

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Abstract : The paper shows how romantic attachment between men is seen as something evil in India, as portrayed in the film Just Another Love Story. The film made us question if it is really something evil that needs to be eradicated from society,or if it is as natural as heterosexuality. Through the review of the film, the article strives to show how romantic attachment between two men has been expressed and represented in literary writings and cinematography. Whether such portrayals of gay relationships as in the movie Just Another Love Story between Chapal Bhaduri and Kumar are accepted as an inevitable part of human experience, glorified as admirable and imitable, or vilified as strange and abnormal. Today, we find that a new tradition of tolerance isemerging in the field of Indian literary tradition. The positive portrayal of various aspects ofmale homosexuality in many contemporary literary works is a kind of attackona societythat is vehemently rancorous against any such bonding. The authentic representation of gaylove affairs and male homosexuality is a kind of revolution because it challengesheterosexuality very strongly by advocating that it is not the only normal and natural way oflove; there are other ways of loving and living too. Moderncinematography, along with homosexual literature, short stories, novels, and poems,hascontributed a lot in this revolutionary counterblast against heteronormativity. The paper attempts to prove how Kaushik Ganguly's film Just Another Love Story is a backlash against the heteronormative mindset of Indian people in general.

Keywords: Gay, Homosexuality, Homophobia, Heteronormativity, Queer.

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1. Introduction

The situation in which Indian culture plays a vital role is largely responsible for the identity crisis and trauma among homoerotically inclined men. Throughout their life, they live in a period of uncertainty and confusion in which a person's sense of identity becomes insecure, typically due to a change in their expected aims or role in society. And it leads to a traumatic, deeply distressing or disturbing experience.

The daily struggle, both internal and external, that a gay man goes through in his life in India has been projected very beautifully in the film Just Another Love Story, directed by Kaushik Ganguly, especially through the character sketch of Abhiroop Sen and the real-lifelegendary Chapal Bhaduri. Though they belong to two different time spaces but in the film, the life story of both heroes goes parallelly.

Just Another Love Story in Bengali Arekti Premer Golpo is a 2010 Indian drama film directed by Bengali filmmaker Kaushik Ganguly and written by Rituparno Ghosh. This film is the first film on homosexuality to be shot after the decriminalization of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code which was again recriminalized and again decriminalized on 6 September 2018. The series of recriminalization and decriminalization of IPC itself is a mockery of the law.

The first screening of this film Arekti Premer Golpo was at the 60th Berlin Film Festival in 2010. The film is about Abhiroop Sen (Rituparno Ghosh), a Delhi-based transwoman documentary filmmaker, whose bisexual lover is the cinematographer (Indraneil Sengupta) of the film. They visit Kolkata to make a documentary on the life of the real-life legendary "jatra" actor Chapal Bhaduri, who in his heyday, was known as "Chapal Rani", noted for his portrayal of female roles on the stage at a time when women did not perform on stage.Initially, Abhiroop Sen has to face some difficulties to start the documentary. But with Chapal Bhaduri's support Abhiroop starts the shoot. During the course of the shoot, Abhiroop feels himself in the position of Chapal Bhaduri. The film goes on with a comparison between Abhiroop's intimate relation with Indraneil Sengupta, who is married to Rani (Churni Ganguly) and Chapal Bhaduri's (Rituparno Ghosh) relation with Kumar (Indraneil Sengupta), who is married to Gopa (Churni Ganguly). In the course of the film Abhiroop gets

attached to Uday and Chapal Bhaduri to Tushar, both played by Jisshu Sengupta. The film takes the viewers through the present life of Abhiroop Sen and past life of Chapal Bhaduri with the same actors. The film focuses on the mental trauma faced by a gay, the rejection by men whom they have loved, after using them sexually.

2. Sexuality and Identity

As projected in the film Just Another Love Story, the identity crisis and trauma of Chapal Bhaduri and Abhiroop Sen is due to a cultural construction. We know Cultural Studies is interested in the process by which power relations between and within groups of human beings organize codes of culture, from food habits to music, scientific discourses to morality, and make meaning. When a community defines and evaluates something as 'good' or 'bad', it has nothing to do with the immanent quality of the thing/event but is the ascription of value by the community to the thing/event (qtd. in Bose 25).

Thus, categories such as gays/lesbians are evaluated as pathologically 'evil', 'abnormal', strictly within a system of meaning-generation. Homosexuality is an outcast because it has been classified as such. Its oppression is thus a cultural and political event. Rejected because it is non-procreative, the homosexual relationship becomes the perverted 'other' of reproductive sex, and hence consigned to a dark secret.Michel Foucault's The History of Sexuality delineates how sexuality and its sparks strictly depend upon a power system. Foucault argues that power and knowledge are intertwined and shape our understanding of knowledge. In his argument, sexuality is socially constructed and so not a biological or natural phenomenon. And so for him, sexuality is a construct of power, knowledge, and discourse. He writes, "Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which tries to hold in check…It is the name that can be given to a historical construct"(Foucault105).In Just Another Love Story, the vigorous verbal attack of heteronormative-culture influenced mass, or better to say, the so-called protectors of culture, on Abhiroop's attempt to make a documentary film on Chapal Bhaduri becomes a good example in this respect:

The mob: This is not a red-light area. It's a respectable locality...

Please! We have enough problems handling two sexes. So do not bring a

third sex into this!You are perverts, promoting 'homos' and disrupting society (00:34:00-00:36:10).

In the film, hearing the hubbub of the crowd, Chapal Bhaduri, being frightened and confused, went

into his room and closed the door from inside, which may be seen as an attempt to become invisible, remaining inside the closet. The problem of being invisible – culturally, politically, socially- is a feature of the everyday lives of those who are described negatively as 'not heterosexual'(as the title of Martin Duberman's book Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past (1989) indicates). Steven Seidmen writes in The New Social Theory: Contemporary Debates (2001)."Symbolically degrading the homosexual contributes to creating dominated gay selves – that is, individuals for whom shame and guilt are at the core of their sense of self; public invisibility becomes in part self-enforced"(Seidmen353).Adrienne Rich, the celebrated American poet and feminist, talked about the same thing in Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence. As she was a radical feminist, her particular focus was on female sexuality, where she argues that heterosexuality among women is not always a natural phenomenon, but a learned behavior in a patriarchal society (Rich 75).

Thus, the processes by and through which homosexuality gets coded as evil or abnormal are evidently the subject of Cultural Studies. Cultural Studies believe that identity is not immanent but constructed out of specific historical circumstances and discourses.

The most significant mode of approaching queer identity and identity politics comes from Judith Butler. Butler begins with the assumption that identity is not a stable entity. Gender – one of the axes of identity, along with race, age, disability, class, sexuality- is "performed" and performed repeatedly:"There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender. . . identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results"(Butler 16).She claims that gender is constantly reduced to 'sex' (meaning, just attributes) and is the 'object' of feminist analysis, while sexuality (suggesting pleasures, acts and identities) is seen as more appropriate for lesbian and gay studies. She says,

"Lesbian and gay studies in this form cannot articulate its own "proper object" outside the terms of this analogy with feminism, an analogy that relegates feminism to an analysis of "gender" reduced to a biological frame and evacuated of all sexuality"(Butler 22).

If we agree with the assumption that gender stereotypes are created, reasserted and thereby maintained by performance- heteronormative performance, if we are talking of stereotypes – then gender itself can be read as performative, the act naturalized to the extent that the actor is identified by it. What if the actor is required to enter and be part of a very different act, one that involves

learning, iterating, and becoming the other pole of the binary? Does the process of unlearning one set of performative norms (in order to learn another set) unsettle, or at least problematize, the actor's sexual identity? Any study on transgender performers would involve a consideration of two kinds of performance: one is a naturalized, received act, the other, voluntarily embraced and therefore consciously learnt. But what if the latter is privileged and is allowed to function as an instrument to redefine the subject's sexuality?

Chapal Rani/Chapal Bhaduri, the famed transgender actor who dominated Bengali Jatra stage of yesteryears, discovered the woman in him within the actual space of performance. As Abhiroop Sen says in the film Just Another Love Story, "he is the first self-evident, self-confessed gay actor of the Bengali stage. His physiological manhood was in contrast with his sexual preference"(00.55.00-00.56.00). As was customary during the times, he was called upon to play a female role in a Jatra, which he accepted because of the promise of a job but which, for him, evolved into a space to confront and come to terms with his own sexuality. The becoming of Chapal Rani is, in fact, a passage to the discovery of his intrinsic being, which is seen to nullify, finally, the original gendered identity. The film Performing the Goddess (1999) by Naveen Kishore is about this becoming which is also being; therefore, it concerns itself more with Chapal Rani than Chapal Bhaduri. It is Chapal Rani whom we see playing the queen of Ahmednagar, the mad widow of Jaichand and the Goddess Sitala- from which the title of the film Performing the Goddess (19991) is derived, and the film succeeds in capturing the ambiguous space of shifting gender roles, especially when the actor is seen playing female characters without make-up or feminine garb, thus doing away with the immediate visual markers of recognition. The way he manages these very credible performances without the aid of essential 'props' hints at the actual process through which gender identities are fixed and stereotyped in a given cultural context. We are convinced that the actor is playing a female role only because his performance agrees with our received behavioral/gestural expectations from a woman; it is as if he cites from a familiar, pre-existent text and is immediately recognized, in spite of his oppositional physical presence. The entire documentary is projected by close-ups of Chapal Bhaduri putting on make-up up transitioning to Chapal Rani; it is as if the film Performing the Goddess constantly reminds us of this transition, perhaps indicating the instability of gender stereotypes, thus contesting the essentialist assumptions of heteropolarity. (qtd. in Bose 564)

In both the film Just Another Love Story and Playing the Goddess, Bhaduri refers to the incident when his mother died; he was only fifteen. As per the ritual, he had to shave his head in spite of his unwillingness because the fifteen-year-old girl inside him did not agree.

Chapal Bhaduri: After Ma died, they all ganged up on. Insisted I shave my head.

I said No! My sister is not doing it. Why should I?

Oh my! How they glared at me!

They had to shave my head and make a man of me.(Just Another Love Story00:68:00-00:69:00)

He was eighteen when he took up the job of playing female roles, entered into a relationship with Kumar, which turned into a homosexual one.Bhaduri does, however, talk about his childhood pastime of dressing up as a woman, winding a cloth around his head and making a faux 'bun', donning feminine clothes and getting regularly scolded by the male elders of the family for his 'queer' preoccupation. His 'new' gender identity, an attempt to gather instances from past life, creates a connection, and thereby indicates that his newfound space is not so new after all; it had always been there, waiting to be discovered. Bhaduri does not seem to have been suffering from troubled gender before stepping into the arena of the Jatra and female roles; when he is approached with the proposal of playing women. It does make sense to believe that it is this cross-gender performance and the attendant process of identification with the opposite gender that had led to the reconfiguration of his sexual preferences and, finally, a change and becoming of a gay.

It does seem that throughout his eighteenth year, he was haunted by what can be called a kind of gender dysphoria, caused by a strong cross-gender identification directly related to the female roles that he was playing during that particular time. And what is more interesting is that, parallel to his realization of his 'different' sexual preference, his newfound gender was already getting fixed with what his heart says. When he looks back and reminisces, what he isolates and focuses on are all in agreement with normative 'female' behavior patterns – he insists that he was 'passive' at the start of the relationship with his friend, and also that his friend approached him first. His hesitation is also a consequence of the identity crisis of a homosexual in a hetronormative society. He also mentions his enjoyment of the passive 'wait' for his friend during his absence: "I really loved this, the yearning for him, the pangs of absence."(qtd. in Bose 561)

Chapal Bhaduri, while narrating the final breaking-off with his partner, seems to adopt the stance of a rejected, wounded woman who suffers intensely yet wishes for his partner's well-being. As

projected in Just Another Love Story, the love life of Chapal Bhaduri with Kumar and his director Abhiroop Sen with Basu is not complete. We can see that there is a temporary happiness. Chapal Bhaduri has to suffer the pangs of rejection, and in the relationship of Abhiroop Sen with Basu there are many lacks. Though Chapal and Abhiroop both have given the whole of them, left heartbroken; they have to live in seclusion, which may lead to depression. In such an atmosphere, a person often becomes confused about his/her orientation or being. This utter confusion may lead to frustration which in turn can be a cause of killing oneself or other. As we often hear of a suicide or murder case of a homosexual. In the film however, Kaushik Ganguly has highlighted the traumatic experience of Chapal Bhaduri and Abhiroop Sen with their bisexual lover in their love life. As in the film Abhiroop says to Basu:

Abhiroop: You try very hard to maintain the status quo. But you forget that somebody somewhere is paying the price for it. Constantly.

Basu:Oh so ours is a really expensive relationship!

Abhiroop: It is. But I do not send you the bills, so you do not get to know.(01:05:00-01:07:00)

A further complexity not addressed by any of the sexual orientation terms (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual) is that it is often not clear if the attraction is towards individuals of a particular sex or a particular gender. Thus, there are men who are primarily attracted to femininity in individuals, though the object of their attraction may be male-bodied. Would such attraction be called bisexual? Or “heterogendered”? Such questions arise when we discuss Chapal Bhaduri or Adhiroop Sen's relationship with their respective lovers. But of course it was a gay relationship because the biological structure of both the couple is male.

In the case of Basu it is clear that he married so that people could not know that he is a homosexual, as it is seen as an evil, an aberration. Abhiroop too said to Basu “you try to maintain a status quo.”(01:17:00-01:18:00)

In a society where marriage and begetting progeny are exalted as sacred duties of every individual, even many of those who are exclusively inclined towards homosexuality end up getting married: some even do so of their own volition. In such circumstances, bisexual identification is probably even more limited than gay or lesbian identification.

Further, a behavior-based understanding of bisexuality tends to pre-dominate in urban middle-class South Asian gay and lesbian communities, where ‘bisexual’ is more often a statement about the

same-sex attracted person being married to someone of the other sex than about the person's sexual orientation per se.

Thus, one finds 'bisexual' being used synonymously with 'married gay' or 'married lesbian', contributing to further misunderstanding about bisexuality as a sexual orientation.

Married bisexual men and women will likely be a characteristic feature of the South Asian queer landscapes for many more years to come. They may even play prominent roles in the nascent movements for gay and lesbian rights. Countless others will, of course, remain invisible, immersed in worldly existence that constitutes family life in South Asia.

Sandip Roy Chowdhury, while speaking about LGBTQ issues, suggests that a few individuals within the South Asian diasporic communities are coming out of their homosexual or heterosexual closets and proclaiming their bisexual identity. If they are doing so then there is a chance for others whether they would like to choose a bisexual partner (qtd. in. Bose 294)

In the film Just Another Love Story, if Chapal Bhaduri and Abhiroop Sen knew that their partners are bisexual, that they have to share their love, that they may be deserted, then they could have chosen somebody else. Their desertion is very much obvious because in a society where heteronormativity is the only acceptable relationship then there is more possibility of the bisexual partner's turning to heterosexuality leaving his homosexual partner heartbroken. Between Homosexuality and heterosexuality a bisexual partner chooses the heterosexuality because he does not want to be deprived of the facilities that society have for a heterosexual relationship.

In Just Another Love Story too we find the same thing. Here Basu's wife Rani holds this cruel truth once again before Abhiroop.

Rani: He (Basu) won't be able to keep up this balancing act all his life.

Trust me, he's going to slip(01:30:00-01:33:00).

The answer to this "we" is very cruel. Because neither of them will be allowed. Abhiroop will be eliminated as he has no right to love a person of his own gender in a heteronormative society.

The argument is for homosexually inclined men and the men who feel feminine from inside, it is completely natural, as discussed above, how Chapal Bhaduri came to terms with his authentic gender identity and sexual preference; but does society accept it as natural? The answer is no. Such denial from society leads to an identity crisis and traumatic experience, which becomes a 'life and death' issue for those who do not fit the construction of heteronormativity.Apart from the cultural

construction which makes oneself doubt his/her gender identity or sexual preference, which results ina split of self or identity crisis, the internalization of heteronormativity and homophobia also have an important role to play in the denial of someone's homosexual self and subsequent identity crisis and trauma. So, the movie Just Another Love Story truly captures the dilemma and existential crisis a queer person goes through while coming to terms with their own identity.

3. Conclusion

Kaushik Ganguly's film Just Another Love Story or Arekti Premer Golpo explores homosexual identity crisis through the themes of internal conflict, societal pressure, self-discovery and dynamics of relationships. The protagonist Abhiroop's struggle to reconcile his gay identity and desires with a heterosexual society gives rise to acute internal conflict and dilemma. The societal pressures represented by the mob in the film highlight the challenges LQBTQ individual confronts in a heteronormative society. Though Abhiroop's journey of self-acceptance is a kind of backlash to a society that is vehemently rancorous against any such boning.

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