

The Evolution of Queer Subjectivity in Bengali Cinema from Rituparno Ghosh to the Ott Era

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1. Introduction

Bengali cinema, informed by a deep legacy of literary humanism, political engagement, and formal experimentation, provides a rich cultural space for examining the articulation of queer subjectivity. Yet for much of its cinematic history, queer lives remained largely invisible or indirectly expressed. Rather than being openly represented, non-normative desires were frequently displaced into metaphor, suggestion, and subtext. This absence was not simply an aesthetic decision but a consequence of entrenched social taboos, legal restrictions, and dominant heteronormative ideologies that rendered queer identities socially unrecognized. As a result, early Bengali films often relied on ambiguity—portraying intense same-sex emotional bonds, cross-gender performances, or figures marked as unconventional or “other”—to gesture toward queerness without explicitly naming it.

Queer theory, with its emphasis on identity as fluid, performative, and contingent, offers a productive framework for interpreting these early cinematic strategies. Instead of presenting stable or self-declared queer identities, such films allowed gender variance and desire to emerge through gestures, emotional intensity, and interpersonal relationships. These moments subtly unsettled normative assumptions about sexuality and gender, even as they stopped short of overt affirmation. In this sense, Bengali cinema reflected a broader cultural contradiction: a history of intellectual openness shaped by the Bengal Renaissance, leftist political

thought, and progressive artistic traditions, coexisting with a conservative moral order that strictly regulated sexuality, family, and social respectability.

From the late twentieth century onward, particularly under the influence of global queer movements, feminist film theory, and postcolonial critique, Bengali cinema began to address queer lives with greater directness and clarity. Independent and parallel cinema proved especially significant in this transformation, offering alternative spaces for storytelling that foregrounded same-sex desire, gender nonconformity, and the everyday realities of queer individuals within Bengali society. These narratives moved beyond symbolic or coded representations, engaging queerness as a lived, embodied experience marked by intimacy, isolation, violence, solidarity, and self-recognition. Significantly, contemporary representations often locate queer subjectivity within concrete social environments—middle-class households, anonymous urban settings, or cultural sites such as literature, theatre, and political activism. Queerness is no longer framed exclusively as transgressive or tragic but is portrayed as relational, evolving, and shaped by intersecting factors such as class, language, geography, and historical memory. This shift resonates with queer theory's critique of universalized identity categories and its insistence on context-specific, intersectional understandings of desire and selfhood.

As a widely consumed public medium, cinema does more than mirror social change; it actively intervenes in the production of cultural meaning. The increasing visibility of queer narratives in Bengali cinema disrupts the presumed naturalness of heterosexuality and expands the range of possible identifications available to audiences. By expressing queer lives through idioms deeply rooted in Bengali cultural sensibilities, these films participate in a broader reimagining of identity—not as a stable essence, but as fluid, negotiated, and continually in the process of becoming.

2. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive research methodology, combining textual analysis, historical contextualization, and audience reception studies to trace the evolution of queer subjectivity in Bengali cinema. The methodology is structured as follows:

2.1. Film Text Analysis

Primary data consists of selected Bengali films that span the trajectory from Rituparno Ghosh's early works (Dahan, 1997; Asukh, 1999) to his explicitly queer films (ArektiPremer Golpo, 2010; Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish, 2012), post-Ghosh films (Nagarkirtan, 2019), and contemporary OTT productions (Amra 2GayTher, 2021). Each film is analyzed for:

- Narrative structures: Plot, character arcs, and storytelling techniques that foreground queer subjectivity.
- Visual and performative elements: Mise-en-scène, costume, body language, and cinematic framing, particularly how gender and desire are performed and represented.
- Dialogues and subtext: Language, silence, and coded cues used to signify non-normative sexualities.

2.2. Historical and Cultural Contextualization

Secondary sources including scholarly articles, newspaper reports, interviews, and archival material provide context for the socio-political and cultural conditions under which these films were made and received. This includes:

- Censorship and societal norms: How legal and moral frameworks shaped representations of gender and sexuality.
- Cultural influences: Adaptations of literature (e.g., Tagore's Chitrangada), theatre traditions, and regional aesthetic sensibilities.

2.3. Theoretical Framework Application

The analysis of queer subjectivity in Bengali cinema is guided primarily by Queer Theory (Butler, 1990) and Sexual Scripting Theory (Simon & Gagnon, 1986), which together provide a robust lens for understanding how films construct, perform, and negotiate gender and desire.

2.4. Queer Theory: Gender Performativity and Identity Construction

Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity challenges the idea of gender as a fixed, innate characteristic. Instead, gender is seen as a series of repeated acts, gestures, and performances that produce the appearance of a coherent identity. Applying this framework to Bengali cinema allows us to understand characters not as inherently male, female, or transgender, but as embodying gender through socially mediated performances.

For example, in *ArektiPremer Golpo* (2010), Abhiroop Sen's transgender identity is expressed through bodily gestures, speech, costume, and interaction with others. These performances highlight how gender is socially negotiated, constantly reshaped by external norms and internal desire. Similarly, in *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish* (2012), dance becomes a medium through which gender and desire are performed and experienced. By reading these films through a Butlerian lens, we can see how cinema not only represents queer identities but also actively constructs them as lived, performative realities. Queer Theory also encourages a critical interrogation of social norms and binary thinking. Early films, such as *Dahan* (1997), may not depict explicit queer characters, but subtextual elements—such as emotional intimacy outside heteronormative frameworks or acts of bodily defiance—can be interpreted as preliminary gestures toward queer performativity. These films reveal how cinematic narratives negotiate the tension between societal regulation and individual identity.

2.5. Sexual Scripting Theory: Cultural, Interpersonal, and Intrapsychic Dimensions of Desire

Simon & Gagnon's sexual scripting theory complements Queer Theory by emphasizing that desire is not simply biological, but shaped by cultural expectations, interpersonal relationships, and internalized norms. In the Bengali context, where family, caste, and community exert strong influence, sexual scripting provides a way to understand how characters navigate love, intimacy, and social constraints.

2.6. For instance:

- In Nagarkirtan (2019), Puti's desires and romantic engagement with Madhu are mediated not only by personal attraction but also by societal norms around gender, caste, and social acceptance. Sexual scripting theory helps explain how these films represent desire as a culturally constructed, socially negotiated phenomenon, rather than a purely personal or biological impulse.

- In OTT narratives such as Amra 2GayTher, the protagonists' relationship is constantly shaped by family expectations, societal stigma, and internalized feelings of shame or fear, highlighting the interplay between intrapsychic processes and cultural norms in queer desire.

By combining Queer Theory and Sexual Scripting Theory, we can view Bengali films as multi-layered texts:

1. Cultural texts that reflect and critique societal attitudes toward gender and sexuality.
2. Sites of identity negotiation, where characters' performances, interactions, and emotional lives enact queer subjectivity.

2.7. Multi-Layered Interpretation

Together, these frameworks allow for an interpretation of Bengali cinema that captures:

- The performative and embodied nature of gender: Characters create and sustain identity through gestures, speech, and social interaction.

- The socially mediated nature of desire: Romantic and sexual feelings are shaped by external pressures, internal negotiations, and interpersonal dynamics.
- The evolution of queer representation over time: From implicit, coded subtext in films like *Dahan* to explicit, intersectional narratives in post-Ghosh cinema and OTT series.
- Cinema as a transformative medium: Films do not simply reflect reality but actively produce cultural understanding of queer lives, challenge heteronormative norms, and open spaces for empathy and dialogue.

2.8. Audience Reception Analysis

Where available, the study incorporates audience and critical responses, particularly for OTT content, to understand:

1. Reception patterns of queer narratives in theatrical versus digital contexts.
2. Societal impact and discourse generated by the visibility of LGBTQIA+ characters.

2.9. Limitations

- Focus is limited to Bengali-language cinema; findings may not generalize to Indian cinema at large.
- Due to the scarcity of academic studies on early queer cinema in Bengal, some interpretive analysis relies on visual and textual inference, supplemented by media reports and interviews.
- This methodology allows for a holistic understanding of queer subjectivity, tracing its evolution from coded, subtextual representation to explicit, nuanced narratives in contemporary Bengali cinema and OTT content.

2.10. Content Analysis

This content analysis examines how queer subjectivity is constructed, represented, and transformed in Bengali cinema across different historical moments and media platforms.

Rather than focusing solely on individual films, the analysis identifies recurring representational patterns, thematic shifts, and narrative strategies that collectively shape the cinematic articulation of queerness. Drawing on qualitative coding of narrative, visual, and performative elements, the analysis is organized around four key dimensions: modes of representation, gender performance, social context, and narrative outcomes.

3. Historical Background: Coded Queerness in Bengali Cinema

Before the emergence of explicitly queer narratives, Bengali cinema often encoded same-sex desire, gender ambiguity, or non-normative identities through subtle narrative and visual cues. These representations were rarely explicit due to strict censorship laws, social conservatism, and the potential for public backlash. Instead, filmmakers relied on metaphor, suggestion, and emotional subtext to hint at queer desire.

Early Bengali films frequently utilized cross-dressing, close male friendships, or intense emotional intimacy between same-sex characters as ways to signal non-normative desire without overtly naming it. For instance, in Ritwik Ghatak's films from the 1950s and 1960s, male bonding is depicted with lingering looks, physical closeness, or emotional dependence, which contemporary critics have read as subtle queer subtext. Similarly, adaptations of Bengali literature often preserved ambiguous portrayals of desire, translating complex emotional landscapes into cinematic codes that could bypass censorship. Moreover, the use of melodramatic storytelling, symbolic imagery, and *mise-en-scène* allowed filmmakers to explore queer themes indirectly. Scenes depicting confinement, marginalization, or unrequited desire often doubled as metaphors for societal oppression of non-normative sexualities. This "coded queerness" created a space where audiences familiar with queer experience could recognize hidden meanings, while mainstream audiences remained unaware or only partially aware. The historical reliance on subtext highlights a tension in Bengali cinema:

while there was a rich tradition of emotional depth and experimental aesthetics, direct representation of queer identities was socially and legally constrained. This set the stage for the eventual emergence of films in the late 20th and early 21st centuries that could engage more openly with queer subjectivity, reflecting broader cultural shifts in India's engagement with sexuality, identity, and human rights.

3.1. Early Work of Rituparno Ghosh: Dahan and Asukh

- **Dahan (1997)**

Dahan (1997) is based on a novel by Suchitra Bhattacharya and dramatizes the aftermath of a sexual assault witnessed by a middle-class woman. While not explicitly queer, the film demonstrates Ghosh's concern with social hierarchies, gendered vulnerability, and identity under constraint, themes that prefigure his later queer narratives. Dahan explores moral judgment, societal policing of bodies, and female solidarity, which resonate with later examinations of marginalized subjectivities, including queer lives.

Ghosh's early aesthetic choices — close focus on emotional subtleties, layered performances, and interrogation of societal norms — establish the groundwork for his exploration of non-normative desires. By portraying the consequences of societal surveillance and moral policing, Dahan indirectly engages with the broader discourse of bodily autonomy, which becomes central in his later queer narratives.

- **Asukh (1999)**

In Asukh, Ghosh examines personal loss, emotional alienation, and professional entrapment through a woman's experience in the medical profession. The film foregrounds psychological interiority and the societal pressures that shape identity, offering early insight into the social frameworks that govern desire and agency. While heterosexual relationships dominate the plot, the focus on marginalized emotional experiences lays a foundation for the empathetic and nuanced portrayal of queer characters in subsequent works.

3.2. Ghosh's Explicit Queer Cinema

- ArektiPremer Golpo (2010)

ArektiPremer Golpo ("Just Another Love Story") is directed by Kaushik Ganguly and features Rituparno Ghosh in the role of Abhiroop Sen, a transgender filmmaker. The film is notable for its dual narrative structure:

- Contemporary narrative: Follows Abhiroop's life, highlighting the social and personal challenges faced by a transgender person in contemporary Kolkata. The story explores themes such as family rejection, societal stigma, and the struggle for romantic and sexual fulfillment, emphasizing how identity is negotiated in everyday life.

- Historical narrative: Interweaves Abhiroop's story with that of Chapal Bhaduri, a jatra theatre performer famous for playing female roles. This historical layer connects present-day queer experiences to a long-standing cultural tradition of gender non-conformity in Bengal, showing that gender fluidity has been part of the cultural fabric even when not publicly acknowledged.

The film explicitly foregrounds queer subjectivity, moving away from coded or metaphorical portrayals that dominated earlier Bengali cinema. Ghosh's performance, along with the film's narrative strategies, emphasizes gender performativity (Butler, 1990), illustrating how gender is enacted through clothing, gestures, and social interaction rather than being biologically fixed. By centering the transgender experience and portraying desire as legitimate and complex, the film challenges audiences to reconsider normative understandings of gender and sexuality.

Significance:

- Marks a transition from subtextual queerness to explicit queer storytelling.
- Links contemporary identity struggles to historical traditions of gender non-conformity.

- Uses cinematic form to make gender performance visible and legible to audiences.
- Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish (2012)

Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish is Ghosh's own directorial and acting project, inspired by Tagore's dance-drama Chitra. The film centers on Ritika, a choreographer grappling with gender identity, societal expectations, and personal desire.

Key elements:

- The film emphasizes how Ritika negotiates her body and identity within professional and social spaces, aligning with Butlerian notions of gender as performative. Each dance, gesture, and costume choice is a performance of gender, illustrating the fluidity of identity.
- Unlike traditional narratives where queer desire is coded or marginalized, the film situates the protagonist's emotional and sexual desires at the narrative center.
- Ritika faces challenges such as misunderstanding, judgment, and professional pressure, reflecting how societal norms regulate bodies and gender expression.

Significance:

- Uses dance and performance as both a literal and metaphorical space for exploring gender and desire.
- Highlights the embodied experience of queer subjectivity, showing how internal identity and external societal expectations interact.
- Continues Ghosh's project of bringing queer lives into explicit visibility while rooting them in Bengali cultural and literary traditions.

3.3. Post-Ghosh Cinema: Expanded Narratives

- Nagarkirtan (2019)

Directed by Kaushik Ganguly, Nagarkirtan tells the story of Puti, a transgender woman, and Madhu, a cisgender man who falls in love with her.

- The film explores not only gender and sexuality but also class, caste, and social marginalization, showing how multiple axes of identity shape lived experiences.
- Societal violence and marginalization: Puti faces harassment, discrimination, and familial rejection, reflecting real-world challenges faced by transgender communities in India.
- Emotional depth and humanity: The romance is portrayed with sensitivity and realism, presenting queer desire as legitimate, complex, and deeply human.

Significance:

- Achieved critical and commercial acclaim, signaling increased acceptance of nuanced queer narratives in Bengali cinema.
- Demonstrates how post-Ghosh cinema continues to foreground marginalized experiences while expanding narrative scope beyond individual identity to social structures.

3.4. Broader Trends in Post-Ghosh Cinema

Following Ghosh's interventions, several Bengali films and web series have attempted to depict queer lives more openly:

- Grihapraves (2025) and Koyekti Meyer Golpo experiment with queer themes but have faced criticism for stereotyping or tokenistic portrayals, showing that while visibility has increased, narrative sophistication is uneven.
- OTT platforms, including Hoichoi and independent web series, are expanding the representational possibilities, enabling stories about LGBTQIA+ relationships, family conflicts, and personal identity to reach wider audiences.
- These works collectively indicate a shift from coded or metaphorical queer representation to explicit, socially engaged storytelling, though challenges in authenticity and nuance remain.

3.5. The OTT Era: Digital Spaces for Queer Storytelling

The rise of OTT (Over-the-Top) platforms has fundamentally transformed Bengali cinema and media consumption. Unlike traditional theatrical releases, which are subject to censorship, limited budgets, and audience conservatism, OTT platforms provide filmmakers with greater creative freedom to explore sensitive or marginalized themes, including queer narratives. This has several implications:

3.6. Expanded Narrative Possibilities

OTT platforms such as Hoichoi, Klikk, and other regional streaming services allow Bengali filmmakers to:

- Tell stories that are explicit about LGBTQIA+ desire, identity, and social struggle—stories that might face regulatory hurdles or limited commercial appeal in theaters.
- Experiment with non-linear storytelling, complex character development, and longer-format web series, giving more room for nuanced exploration of queer subjectivity.
- Address themes such as family conflict, societal rejection, mental health, and inter sectionalism in ways that are rarely possible in mainstream cinema.

For example, the web series *Amra 2GayTher* explores the challenges of same-sex love in a conservative Bengali household, focusing on the negotiation between personal identity and familial expectations. Unlike films constrained by box-office considerations or censorship, OTT series can devote time to showing everyday negotiations of queer identity, such as coming out, intimacy, and relationship conflicts.

3.7. Narrative Risk-Taking

OTT platforms encourage risk-taking because:

- The audience is more niche and targeted, allowing stories aimed at LGBTQIA+ communities or socially progressive viewers to find reception without needing mass-market approval.

- Creators can explore themes of gender fluidity, transgender identity, and queer desire without reducing them to stereotypes or comedic tropes.
- This environment has led to stories that are more honest and experimental, incorporating social commentary, psychological depth, and cultural specificity.

The OTT era also expands audience engagement:

- Viewers can stream content privately, reducing fear of stigma and allowing queer audiences to see them represented.
- The format allows for more diverse representation of gender, sexual orientation, class, and cultural background. For example, stories can focus on a transgender protagonist from rural Bengal or explore same-sex relationships in middle-class urban households, something rarely explored in theatrical cinema.
- Platforms allow feedback and interaction (comments, social media discussions), giving creators insight into audience reception and shaping future narratives.

4. Remaining Challenges

Despite the narrative freedoms offered by OTT platforms, significant challenges persist in the representation of queer subjectivity:

4.1. Stereotyping, Tokenism, and Superficial Representation

While OTT series and films can explore LGBTQIA+ themes more openly than theatrical cinema, some content falls into stereotypical portrayals or tokenistic inclusion. Characters may be reduced to a single trait—such as flamboyance, promiscuity, or tragedy—rather than being depicted as fully realized, multidimensional individuals. In some cases, queer characters are included primarily to heighten drama, shock audiences, or fulfill diversity quotas, which can undermine authenticity. This tendency limits the transformative potential of digital storytelling, as audiences may receive reinforced clichés instead of nuanced, empathetic insights into queer lives.

4.2. Limited Accessibility and Digital Divide

The reach of OTT platforms is constrained by internet access, subscription costs, and technological literacy, meaning that rural, economically marginalized, or older audiences may be excluded from viewing queer narratives. As a result, many of these stories circulate primarily within urban, middle-class, or digitally connected communities. This creates a situation where visibility and representation are unevenly distributed, potentially reinforcing existing social inequalities in access to progressive media and cultural dialogue.

4.3. Cultural Bubble and Social Acceptance

Even when stories are available online, broader societal acceptance often lags behind their availability. Many of these narratives primarily engage audiences who are already open or sympathetic to LGBTQIA+ perspectives, creating a kind of cultural bubble. While progressive, these representations may have limited impact in challenging entrenched social norms or prejudices in more conservative communities. Consequently, the potential of OTT media to act as a vehicle for widespread social change is tempered by structural, cultural, and attitudinal barriers that persist outside the digital sphere.

4.4. Content Prioritization and Narrative Depth

Some OTT productions prioritize entertainment, sensationalism, or melodrama over careful exploration of queer experiences. This can result in narratives that superficially address issues of identity, desire, and marginalization without engaging with the complexity, intersectionality, and lived realities of LGBTQIA+ communities. For instance, the pressures faced by transgender characters or the nuanced negotiation of family and societal acceptance, may be oversimplified or sidelined in favor of plot-driven suspense or romance. In summary, while OTT platforms have radically expanded opportunities for queer representation, these challenges indicate that digital freedom alone is insufficient. For queer storytelling to achieve both authenticity and social impact, creators must navigate the

tensions between entertainment and education, visibility and depth, accessibility and inclusivity, ensuring that diverse audiences can engage meaningfully with these narratives.

4.5. Significance for Queer Cinema

In essence, the OTT era represents a democratization of queer storytelling in Bengali media:

- It removes barriers imposed by traditional censorship and market pressures.
- It allows for long-form, emotionally complex, and socially engaged narratives.
- It creates new spaces for dialogue between creators and audiences, enabling queer identities to be portrayed as fully human, socially embedded, and culturally grounded.

Thus, the OTT era can be seen as a logical extension of Rituparno Ghosh's legacy, where earlier theatrical attempts at queer representation laid the groundwork for today's more open and diverse storytelling, even if challenges in authenticity and reception remain.

5. Discussion

The trajectory from Rituparno Ghosh's early films like *Dahan* (1997) to contemporary OTT content exemplifies a progressive unfolding of queer subjectivity in Bengali cinema. In *Dahan*, the queer lens is subtle but present: the film's focus on social marginalization, bodily autonomy, and emotional negotiation under societal pressure gestures toward the experiences of non-normative identities, even if homosexuality or transgender identity is not explicitly depicted. Here, empathy toward marginalized identities lays the groundwork for future, more overt queer storytelling. With Ghosh's later works, such as *ArektiPremer Golpo* (2010) and *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish* (2012), queer subjectivity moves from the margins to the narrative center. These films explicitly foreground gender fluidity, transgender experience, and non-normative desire, using cinema as a space to interrogate

performative constructions of gender (Butler, 1990) and the social scripts that regulate desire (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Queerness is no longer coded; it is embodied, relational, and socially mediated, challenging audiences to confront normative assumptions about gender and sexuality.

The rise of OTT (Over-The-Top) platforms has been a watershed moment for Bengali media, creating new spaces where queer stories can be told with greater complexity, diversity, and visibility than traditional theatrical cinema allowed. OTT platforms like Hoichoi have emerged as key sites of narrative experimentation, offering long-form content that can delve into sensitive themes without the same commercial pressures or censorship constraints faced by mainstream films. One of the most significant examples of queer-inflected storytelling on Bengali OTT is the web series *Hello* and its subsequent seasons. Originally streaming on Hoichoi, *Hello* blends elements of thriller and psychological drama while also subtly exploring non-normative relationships and the fluidity of desire. The complex relationship dynamics between characters Nandita and Nina move beyond heteronormative binaries, suggesting queer emotional entanglements without necessarily labeling them, thereby normalizing fluid forms of intimacy on a mainstream regional platform. Studies of the series note this as an example of LGBTQIA+ representation that challenges traditional frameworks and fosters inclusivity in Bengali digital content.

Another relevant instance, although not primarily focused on queer narratives, can be found in *Phirki* on ZEE5, which is notable for its portrayal of a transgender character, Lokkhi, in a pivotal role. The series demonstrates how digital and television platforms have opened up narrative space for transgender characters to be integrated into mainstream storylines rather than confined to peripheral or symbolic roles. Although *Phirki* does not center on queer romance, the presence of a transgender character within its core narrative signals a broader diversification of gender representation

on screen, made possible by the relative creative flexibility of OTT platforms and evolving audience sensibilities. Other web content — such as proposed series like *Amra 2GayTher* — signal an ongoing shift toward explicit queer romance and social conflict on regional digital platforms. Produced for platforms like *Klikk*, this series follows the relationship between two men and their attempts to navigate familial resistance, acceptance, and the social pitfalls of same-sex love, marking a clearer break from the ambiguity of earlier portrayals toward openly queer storytelling. Even where queer themes are not the central focus, digital content like additional *Hoichoi* originals illustrates the growing cultural space in which gender and sexuality can be portrayed more openly. Platforms increasingly commission a range of original Bengali content — from thrillers to romance — creating a fertile environment for diverse narratives that include or intersect with queer experiences.

6. Conclusion

The evolution of queer subjectivity in Bengali cinema, from Rituparno Ghosh's early works like *Dahan* (1997) to contemporary OTT narratives, represents a nuanced continuum of representation, visibility, and cultural negotiation. In *Dahan*, while queer identities are not explicitly depicted, the film's exploration of social marginalization, gendered vulnerability, and moral policing gestures toward an empathetic understanding of lives outside the normative social framework. This early sensibility laid the groundwork for Ghosh's later interventions, where queer lives are no longer peripheral but occupy the narrative center. With films such as *ArektiPremer Golpo* (2010) and *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish* (2012), queer subjectivity becomes explicitly articulated and embodied. These works foreground transgender identity, same-sex desire, and gender fluidity, using cinematic techniques—such as narrative layering, body-centric performance, and visual symbolism—to reveal the performative nature of gender. Applying Judith Butler's

concept of gender performativity (1990), these films show that gender is not a fixed essence but is enacted through repeated gestures, choices, and social interactions. Similarly, sexual scripting theory (Simon & Gagnon, 1986) illuminates how desire is mediated by cultural norms, interpersonal negotiation, and internalized social pressures, reflecting the complex ways in which queer characters navigate love, intimacy, and social belonging. The post-Ghosh era, exemplified by Kaushik Ganguly's *Nagarkirtan* (2019) and other contemporary films, further expands the narrative terrain. These works address intersectional dimensions of queer experience, including caste, class, and familial dynamics, emphasizing that queer subjectivity is inseparable from broader social and structural realities. The stories depict both the resilience and vulnerability of LGBTQIA+ characters, showing how social stigma, marginalization, and systemic barriers shape their lived experiences.

The emergence of the OTT era has amplified this evolution, creating digital spaces where queer narratives can flourish beyond the constraints of theatrical censorship and commercial imperatives. Web series such as *Amra 2Gay* and *Ther* highlight intimate, everyday negotiations of queer identity, portraying familial conflict, romance, and social resistance with unprecedented visibility and narrative freedom. OTT platforms enable experimentation with form, genre, and character depth, while allowing queer audiences to engage with stories that resonate with their own lived experiences. However, the medium also presents challenges, including the risk of stereotyping and uneven attention to narrative nuance, highlighting that representation is an ongoing negotiation rather than a fixed achievement. Examined through the lens of queer theory, the journey from Dahan to contemporary OTT productions shows that Bengali cinema operates not merely as a reflection of social realities but also as a performative arena in which gender, desire, and identity are expressed, challenged, and reshaped. In these films, queer subjectivity appears both as an individual experience and as relationally constructed,

influenced by cultural context, societal expectations, audience interpretation, and the possibilities offered by new media. This progression highlights a movement from subtle, coded portrayals of marginalized identities toward more direct and complex representations of queer lives, reflecting broader shifts in cultural understandings of gender and sexuality. Overall, the development of queer narratives in Bengali cinema emphasizes the power of film to foster visibility, dialogue, and social critique. From the understated moral and societal reflections of Ghosh's earlier works to the inclusive, intersectional, and digitally mediated storytelling of the OTT era, Bengali cinema has increasingly provided platforms for queer experiences to be acknowledged, humanized, and celebrated. The ongoing growth of these narratives suggests a future in which queer identities are not treated as marginal curiosities but are recognized as essential, normalized, and empathetically portrayed elements of Bengali cultural expression.

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