

## 'Caged' Desire and Spaces of Silence: Resistance as a Marketing Strategic Device used for Positioning Queer Subjectivity in Tripura Short Film Bakshabondhi

Ms. Debasmita Biswas<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Gitanjali Roy<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar (Ph.D. In English), Faculty Of Liberal Arts, Icfai University Tripura, Email : Debasmitab124@Gmail.Com, Orcid Id- <https://Orcid.Org/0009-0000-3947-1537>

<sup>2</sup> Asst. Professor & Coordinator, Faculty Of Liberal Arts, Icfai University Tripura, Email : Itzgitz@Gmail.Com, Orcid Id- <https://Orcid.Org/0000-0003-3672-3481>

### ABSTRACT

Bakshabondhi, an award-winning short film from Tripura, has earned recognition and appreciation far beyond the state. The movie shows a story that revolves around queer content. Most often as seen, in many films queer characters are either ignored or represented in a restricted manner. But Bakshabondhi gives a distinct overview which shows the emotional turmoil of queer individuals in a society within set norms. The work analyzes how the film portrays desire and queer identity through its storyline and visual scene. It looks at the way the film challenges traditional ideas. It also questions about male intimacy and the process it is marketed sometimes. The paper adopts close reading of the film and qualitative analysis to apprehend the meaning behind the plot of the movie. Through its narrative, the cinema creates a space for queer voices by presenting love as a form of silent resistance against societal expectations. Therefore, in this regard, the study might raise important discussion on queer identity and its representation.

**Keywords:** Queer narrative, Resistance, Marketing, Regional Short Film, Tripura

### INTRODUCTION:

Regional cinema often shows both control and expression at the same time (Barman). In many community's people's feelings and desires are limited by social, cultural and family rules. This can be apprehended as caged desire where emotion or personal choice cannot be freely expressed. In these situations, desire is not only a personal feeling. But also shaped by shape society to decide what kind of relationships are accepted in public. Those who do not follow these rules are often seen as the 'other' meaning they are excluded from social spaces and not fully accepted by the community.

'Writing love' in the film serves as a cinematic strategy for the director to depict the affection between two couple-Subho-and-Neel and Subho-Maithili. The film shows the idea of desire between three people. One couple follow society's rules while the other try to go beyond the set rules. This portrays the hurdle between expressing one's own feelings and social expectations. In personal moments, the characters in the movie show deep emotions. Subho feel pressure from society (Reality Principle by Freud) but also has his own desire (Freudian Pleasure Principle) which he cannot openly express. This creates inner conflict within him. Although the film works according to the social norm but it still shows the queer love through visuals, memories and emotions. It questions traditional ideas about gender relationships. An important part of the plot is how queer identity shaped by set culture. Because social rules often control the expression of individuals which they wanted to show in real without any bindings. But unfortunately, some are accepted and some discouraged. In the film *Bakshabondhi*, love is shown

through the places of quiet moments in everyday life through symbolic scenes. The film avoids showing queer identity as stereotypical. Rather it centers on real emotion and experiences. The so-called male dominated ideas are over shadowed and shown queer people as a section that too deserve respect and understanding on the ground of humanity. With all these stances, it can be considered that the film might be a space of control and expressions of true feelings.

Narrative resistance in this context means telling stories of queer individuals in a distinct way. Rather than showing them as the stereotypes these focuses on their lived experiences (Lance). Many prominent scholars like Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have given ideas that help to understand the theoretical ideas related to such notion. Butler explained that gender preferences are something which people did not born with, instead it gets performed according to social rules (Kakoliris). Because of these rules, queer desire mostly remains under pressure. But there are people who challenges this order which in this paper can be described as a condition of 'caged' desire. Even by staying silent, many can express resistance to the set expectations. In a similar pipeline, Sedgwick in one of the most influential work *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) talks about sexuality that is understood through opposites like secrecy and openness, hiding and revealing. These decide how sexuality can be known in society. she mentions that one can understand the sexual preferences by how one hides or openly expresses their feelings. This constant force act as a balance between what is spoken and unspoken. This makes queer identity more understandable both socially and culturally.

Michel Foucault’s notion offers another dimension to understand queer narratives. He said that power does not only silence people but changes how they speak about things (Haugaard). These help to know that caging desire and writing love are not only metaphors but explain how queer lives appear and exist within social control. Thus, when all these ideas are connected together in the context of regional cinema, it becomes eventually more powerful. Talking about the regional film industries in India, they face certainly two kinds of problems. One they remain mostly ignored by the considered mainstream Bollywood cinema. Second, they also face limitation of storytelling because of their local traditions (Barman). But parallelly it also cannot be denied that because of this feature regional films develop its own style. In the same thread, Tripura is one of the India’s smaller states and has limited film resources. It has struggled and is continuing to maintain an industry. However, despite these limitations, filmmakers from the regions have created influential films that reflect local culture, language and so on. short film like *Bakshabondhi* directed by Siddhartha Saha and produced by Pinky Banik, show how this regional cinema can become a space for creativity. Such represents a different way of involving oneself on the sensitive issues of queerism. To be more precise, this notion can be simply understood through the idea of new position of enunciation (1990) by Stuart Hall. It means presenting the identities in ways that challenge the dominant film narratives. According to him, the mainstream, representation can be questioned the way the marginalized cultural works create new ideas (Lucy and Pixel). in this context, *Bakshabondhi* can be seen as a film that presents such content which challenges the usual expectations of the cinema culture in the region.

Even the concern to show more about gender and sexuality has increased in the field of cinema. But when it comes to regional film culture which is very nascent, might face problem in depicting such sensitive issues. It is very far from the considered mainstream cinema which challenges the idea of heterosexual (the accepted ones in the society) relationships (Zhu). This idea of heteronormativity which means that society treats heterosexuality as the natural form of relationship was explained by Michael Warner in *Fear of a Queen Planet* (1991). Early scholars like Arianne Rich and Gayle Rubin also discussed how society controls gender and sexuality. In the essay *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* (1980), rich argues that heterosexuality is not only a personal choice but a system which is supported by patriarchal power. Similarly, Rubin in *The Traffic in Women* (1975) explains that societies organize gender and sexuality through social rules that decide which relationships are accepted and which are rejected. Regional queer cinema examines social conventions through the lens of Tripura. Films produced in this Indian state subvert traditional definitions of relationships by representing non-heteronormative desire, highlighting the existence of diverse ways how queer individuals experience themselves (Gore). *Bakshabondhi* from Tripura is one such example that uses emotional experience through written language to capture what is often unexpressed or ‘buried’ within oneself. The film shows how suppressed desire can turn into an act of

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expression and resistance giving voice, visibility an emotion to experiences that are often silenced.

This discussion in the present study begins with the idea that queer expression in regional cinema is shaped by social rules but also challenges them. In *Bakshabondhi* even though society tries to control people’s feelings, desire still finds ways to be expressed through silence, emotions and small actions. Overall, the paper shows that even though Tripura cinemas is not very widely known, it still discusses about queer identity and social resistance.

### **Narrative Arc: Unfolding the Plotline of the Film**

The film directed by Siddhartha Saha is set in a rural village. It begins with a young boy named Neel. He is doing activities that are usually linked with girls. He plays with a cooking set, brings water in a pot and holds a doll as if he is putting it to sleep. He also covers his head with a “gamcha” (a towel) like a veil. Suddenly a strict male voice calls his name. Neel quickly stops playing and runs away. While leaving, he spills the water. This moment shows how his innocent dreams are suddenly broken. Neel then carefully keeps his toys inside a trunk. Inside the same trunk he also keeps Bengali wedding items like a “banarasi saree” (a bridal cloth worn by women), “maala” (wedding garland), “topor” (a conical groom’s headgear worn in Bengali weddings), “shaankha-pola” (red and white bangles worn by Bengali married women), and a “gaach kouto” (a small vermilion box used in weddings). These items show that Neel’s childhood desires are locked away just like his hidden dreams. Next, the narrative takes us to a café. A lady is sitting reading a novel and sipping her coffee. There Neel walks in and she asks him about his recent writing project. Neels gives her a copy of his writing to look. Inside, she discovers a photograph of Ayushman Khurana. Their conversation is very casual. Eventually, Neel indicates her that the true subject matter focuses on someone else named Subho. Neel remembers how he first met subho near the end of their college days in the library. At first, they did not talk much. But during free time Neel used to read his poems to Subho. Slowly their friendship became stronger. One important moment happens in a café. Subho sits close to Neel even though people around them tease them. This moment makes their emotional bond stronger. Neel says that his writing existed only because of subho. One day. While they are sharing poems, Subho tells Neel that he should write for everyone and not only for him. He asks Neels to promise that he will follow this dream. Later, Subho’s mother sees them laughing together. She becomes suspicious. When she talks with a woman friend, she clearly shows that she doesn’t support same-sex relationships. She insists that her son is not someone who would love another man. Soon after this, Subho tells Neel that his marriage has been arranged with a woman name Maithili. Neel is shocked but remains calm. He wishes subho happiness and shows him the childhood items he had kept in the trunk. Neel tells subho that once he moves forward with his married life, he should never look back. After subho leaves, Neel breaks down emotionally. After the marriage Subho feels emotionally distant from Maithili. He keeps remembering Neel and the poems hey shared together. Later Maithili finds Neel’s writings and understands the truth. She confronts Subho and asks him why he hid this from her.

Their conversation was heard by Subho's mother. She interrupts and says that she thought this was Subho's "Oshuk" (disease). She explains that she had visited a "Babaji" (a spiritual devotee) who suggested marriage as a cure for his relationship with another man. But Maithili strongly rejects this idea. She says that Subho is completely fine and the real problem is society's narrow thinking. Her words show that it is social prejudice not the relationship that creates stigma. The film ends by returning to the café scene shown at the beginning. One year has passed since the events that changed their lives. The same woman from the café appears again. This time she is holding a trophy and congratulates Neel for winning the "Best Young Writer of the Year". She tells him that his love still lives through his writing. Neel quietly wonders if the story has really ended. The woman replies that it is not his story, it is also the story of thousands of people whose love remains incomplete and emotions are still unheard (NAAD The Cosmic Sound).

### Performing Queer Identities: Silence as a Tool of Social Control

Queer identity in cinema is not only about showing queer characters on screen. It rather shows how characters express themselves and deal with silence (Madanayake). Identity is not a static force. It is shaped by how one acts and responds to social expectations. This means that queer identity can be understood through how a character behaves and interacts with others. And how much of their identity they are able to show in society. Sometimes people follow social rules, and sometimes they challenge them through their everyday actions, choices and gestures. Even small gestures, pauses or very little dialogue can show desires without directly saying them. In this way, silence becomes a subtle way to express identity while still dealing with social rules.

In society, people are expected to behave in ways that are considered 'normal' or acceptable. Because of this, sometimes LGBTQIA+ people feel pressured to conceal their emotions, a part of their identity, due to potential judgement from others. Freud's theory of mind (id, ego, superego) thereby establishes a theoretical stance to apprehend the thought process behind such behaviour. The id drives emotional fulfilment (natural desires), and the id wants to destroy a marketing profession. The superego represents the acquired values from family and environment (great people) and provides a judgement on what is right and wrong. The ego exists between the two and balances them to indicate how people should behave in their everyday life.

In queer experiences, the most obvious way that participants may develop conflict is when their own personal feelings differ from what is expected of them by society. *Bakshabondhi's* Neel exemplifies this struggle with Subho in Figure 1. His behaviour appears calm and controlled. However, within him he has feelings of attraction to Subho and desires to be close to him. At the same time, he is aware of social norms regarding same-sex relationships and that it may not be normal for him to express those feelings in public; therefore, Neel must engage in self-control to hide his attempts to express interest. The way he engages with Subho at this time

reveals the effort and energy that go towards managing his feelings and protecting himself from the judgement of society. Here, silence also plays an important role; silence is used as a means of safely and cautiously expressing feelings. In addition, Neel's hesitance indicates how slowly queer relationships develop; meaning that many queer individuals fear that they will be ridiculed if they announce their interest in developing a relationship with another individual of the same sex. The behaviour of Neel also reflects the tension between his personal feelings and the scrutiny of those around him.



Fig. 1. NAAD The Cosmic Sound, YouTube, 2025.

Neel doesn't explicitly identify himself in an overt manner. Rather, he exhibits his identity through subtle behaviour that stems from it. This illustrates how Queer identities tend to develop within forces of pressure rather than through their complete freedom because, regardless of the potential for them to speak up for themselves and the subsequent radical transformation of society, people will always find opportunities to do so. 'To contest silence' is to express oneself in different ways i.e., to try to express one's self indirectly when one is unable to do so verbally. According to Michel Foucault, silence does not mean lack of speech; it is a constitutive part of how power is expressed by means of speech (Haugaard). Similarly, silence can also be used to communicate meaning through gestures, etc. In *Bakshabondhi*, silence acts as an important device to help develop aspects of the narrative which otherwise could not be openly expressed due to their inability of being spoken aloud. For example, Neel's feelings towards Subho are suggested through various small gestures and cues such as making eye contact and cuddling closely together, and providing an implicit way for those characters to demonstrate their relationship.



Fig. 2. NAAD The Cosmic Sound, YouTube, 2025.

At 3:45 in figure two, Neel and Subho make eye contact for the very first time. They don't say anything but this

exchange of looks has a great deal of significance. Like small moments of closeness shown earlier, this look quietly hints at Neel’s feelings for Subho. In situations where people cannot openly talk about their emotions, gestures become meaningful. It has a hidden message. In this way, the film uses silence to show feelings that cannot be spoken aloud. These moments help the audience to understand the character’s emotions. They show that silence can also be a way for people to express them more carefully.

Tripura as a regional film industry show tension between identity and silence. Unlike Bollywood, where queer characters are often stretched as either comic or tragic figures, *Bakshabondhi* shows queer identity through simple daily life moments. Place like home, libraries or cafes become spaces where identity is shown very minutely. In figure 1 the library scene shows Neel and Subho sharing a quiet glance. Even though they are in public place, their feelings remain hidden. It shows desire through silence rather than words. In these settings, silence considers as a way to show queerness indirectly. It allows the film to portray intimacy without stating it. This notion reflects what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls the epistemology of the closet. It defines the existence of identity between hiding and revealing. Neel’s identity is also shaped by heteronormative pressures, especially from his father’s authority. This shows how patriarchal system control acceptable relationships. His silence is therefore nor personal but socially created. Likewise, silence opens new ways of expression. The usage of pauses, glances show emotions. This can connect with Foucault’s view that says repression can create new forms of discourse. This is how silence becomes a storytelling tool. Even the notion connects to regional cinema acting as a cultural practice (Miles). Tripura’s film industry is small and often ignored by larger industries. Making *Bakshabondhi* become a form of resistance. It establishes the visibility factor of regional cinema with wide reachability. So queer identity in regional films can be shaped by silence too. It is not empty; rather a creative force where queerness is shown in a meaningful space.

### Spatial Dynamics: Desire in Confinement

Understanding desire in restricted spaces mean looking at how relationships are shown when society or family create limitations. In societies where heteronormativity is so strong that queer feelings aren’t shown openly. It appears in restriction through symbolism certainly (Loh et al.). the film *Bakshabondhi* shows this situation. Desire even if personal but still gets shaped by society. gestures like eye-rolling, side glances, gentle touches become the symbol of hidden feelings. Through this, viewers understand that this relationship is complex and may not always fit in society’s accepted norms. for Subho social acceptance is important; for Neel the pain of rejection is central; and for Maithili hiding the truth becomes difficult to accept. Some viewers may relate either to Subho, Neel or Maithili. Therefore, the film suggests finally that many people like Neel exists around us whose stories still remain unheard. Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* explains that repression does not destroy desire but shapes how it is expressed (Valentina et al.). in this sense, silence becomes a cultural path through which desire finds expression openly

breaking social rules. The film also shows how Neel and Subho try to keep their bond alive in public places such as libraries, cafes and poetry readings. This reflects how repression create new forms of expression rather than simply silencing them. The opening scene of Neel as a child show restriction begins early.



Fig. 3. NAAD The Cosmic Sound, *YouTube*, 2025.

In figure 3 young Neel plays with symbols of womanhood such as dolls and household items. At 0:52, his father abruptly halts him. Later, Neel conceals all four items in a trunk, a clear indication that his dreams and identity are still there; they, however, are out of sight. The trunk is a representation of his suppressed identity; thus, the trunk represents Neel's feelings, his emotions quietly stored away. Sedgwick's 'closet' concept explains this moment well, since it refers to the notion of secrecy while simultaneously explaining how queer identities endure through hidden expression. Unspoken identities also continue to be present in this setting.



Fig. 4. NAAD The Cosmic Sound, *YouTube*, 2025.

These examples illustrate how societal constraints limit the expression of queer love. Butler's gender performativity theory posits that there are ways to create a space for queer love through repetitive actions. In the film, queer people express their intimacy through repetitive gestures such as sitting next to one another despite being judged publicly, and writing poetry to convey feelings of love without actually having to say them. There is never a fixed space; a home can provide safety but also become a control device when a family pushes children to marry heterosexuals. Finally, art, poetry, and memory are used to communicate feelings that have been hidden from public view by society (Shah) and can be used to encourage preservation of those feelings and the relationships associated with them. Sedgwick’s opinion on what can’t be articulated is also validated by Herring, in that coded aspects of culture continue to live even after being pressured. As queer individuals are faced with restrictions, they can still picture other ways of living. This idea is also referred to by Jose Esteben Munoz as the ‘queer utopia’ in which hope and imagination create a vision of the future that is different from what we

currently know. In this sense, restricted desire involves both loss but also continuity and survival. Traces of queer relationships can also be found in literature, memory, and social relationships regardless of their being silenced or held back (Hagai and Zurbriggen). When looking at *Bakshabondhi*, one can see how this story is not just about repression, but survival as well; filled trunks of toys, quiet rendezvous at libraries, and intimate poetry exchanges among friends are all signifiers for how desire transforms and survives through time. These scenes, shown at timestamps 3:45 and 1:28 in figure 2 and figure 4 show that queer identity is never completely erased.

### Signs and Signifiers: Reading Queer Defiance in *Bakshabondhi*

Movies might show resistance through symbols. In this regard, Siddhartha Saha’s film *Bakshabondhi*, uses such symbols to show queer resistance in a society that often ignores such identities. To understand these symbols, ideas from queer theory are useful especially Judith Butler’s idea of performativity and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s ideas on queer representation. These help explain how simple objects in the film get deeper meaning.

The film starts with Neel’s childhood play. He holds a doll and covers his head with “gamcha” (towel). These things are usually used in Bengali marriage rituals. But in Neel’s hands, they take on a different meaning. Instead of showing a normal marriage they help him imagine another identity and same-sex feeling (Bradford et al.). Butler’s idea of performativity helps to know this. She says gender is not fixed and can be understood by actions. Neel’s play in figure 1 is not only imitation but an imagination of different self. Later, when he hides these things in a trunk as shown in figure 3 it shows how his feelings are suppressed by family pressure. Keeping them safe is also a subtle act of resistance, as these memories can resurface again in the future.

Protests are also expressed via physical movements such as illustrated in figure 5.



Fig. 5. NAAD The Cosmic Sound, *YouTube*, 2025.

For example, in a cafe, Subho is adjacent to Neel even though people are making fun of him around them. The closeness can silently be seen as a form of resisting against the social norm that limits or constrains how males can express intimacy with one another. Although this is such a small act, it is still a challenge to the social rule that dictates how males are to physically express intimacy towards one another. Resistance in queer theory doesn’t only exist in large acts of rebellion but can also exist in simple acts like everyday life (Riggs and Treharne). By

sitting beside Neel and ignoring the ridicule, Subho shows support and closeness. Thus, making it a symbol of taking queer desire a not always part of being hidden.

Another symbol of resistance in the film comes from Maithili Shubho’s wife. when she speaks to Shubho’s mother and says that homosexuality is not a disease, she stands against the old beliefs. Figure 5 and figure 6 show how Maithili takes step. She clearly says that subho is fine and rejects the belief that his sexuality is wrong. Her action can also be understood through the idea of intersectionality. Kimberle Crenshaw explains that identity factors like gender, sexuality and culture work together to shape people’s experiences (Shields). Maithili’s resistance is important because it comes from within the family system itself. Even though she is part of traditional structure, she challenges it and stands against both patriarchy and forced heterosexual norms.



Fig. 6. NAAD The Cosmic Sound, *YouTube*, 2025.

Finally, the film ends with Neel receiving an award for his writing. In figure 7 he is recognized as the ‘Best young writer’. Neel’s success is not just individual in nature, as the trophy is also an emblem of defiance, and conveys the idea that the tale and experience behind it will carry on. The award is public acknowledgement of Neel’s decision(s) and self-image with regard to his sexual orientation.



Fig.7. NAAD The Cosmic Sound, *YouTube*, 2025

As such, *Bakshabondhi* uses its characters as an embodiment of resistance through their various forms of expression. Within the trunk-full of toys, it exhibits both the underlying feelings of the individuals and expresses survival. Writing serves as Neel’s outlet for expressing on his queer love via writing as seen in silence as noted by Doucette; similarly, even simple gestures such as; Subho sitting close to him, as well as Maithili’s speaking out against prejudice portrays resistance. Ultimately, Neel’s receipt of an award exemplifies that no matter what, the feelings or identity of Neel will never be erased.

### **Concluding Reflections: Resistance used as a Marketing Tool to Reposition Queer Subjectivity**

Examining depictions of queerness on-screen illustrates how love, identity and resistance are represented in those communities whose members are frequently erased from the public sphere. A queer identity is fluid; it is created and recreated as individuals navigate their emotional experiences to create a fit with the rules imposed upon the individual by society. The concepts of Butler and Sedgwick assist in providing an understanding of film as a medium that exposes these suppressed experiences. Film is also a medium that retains the possibility for new futures in queerness, a phenomenon that Munoz has identified as queer futurity. Silence also performs a crucial function in this context. Foucault explains how silence can convey meaning. Queer emotions can often be demonstrated through the use of gestures, symbols and quiet behaviour. Yet, today’s mass media can also translate queer identities into commodities for consumption. Thus, silence can perform as a site of resistance. Sedgwick’s concept of the closet suggests that the places where desire is concealed can also be used to demonstrate its existence.

Regional film is an essential part of the discussion about how smaller global film culture’s express identity.

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