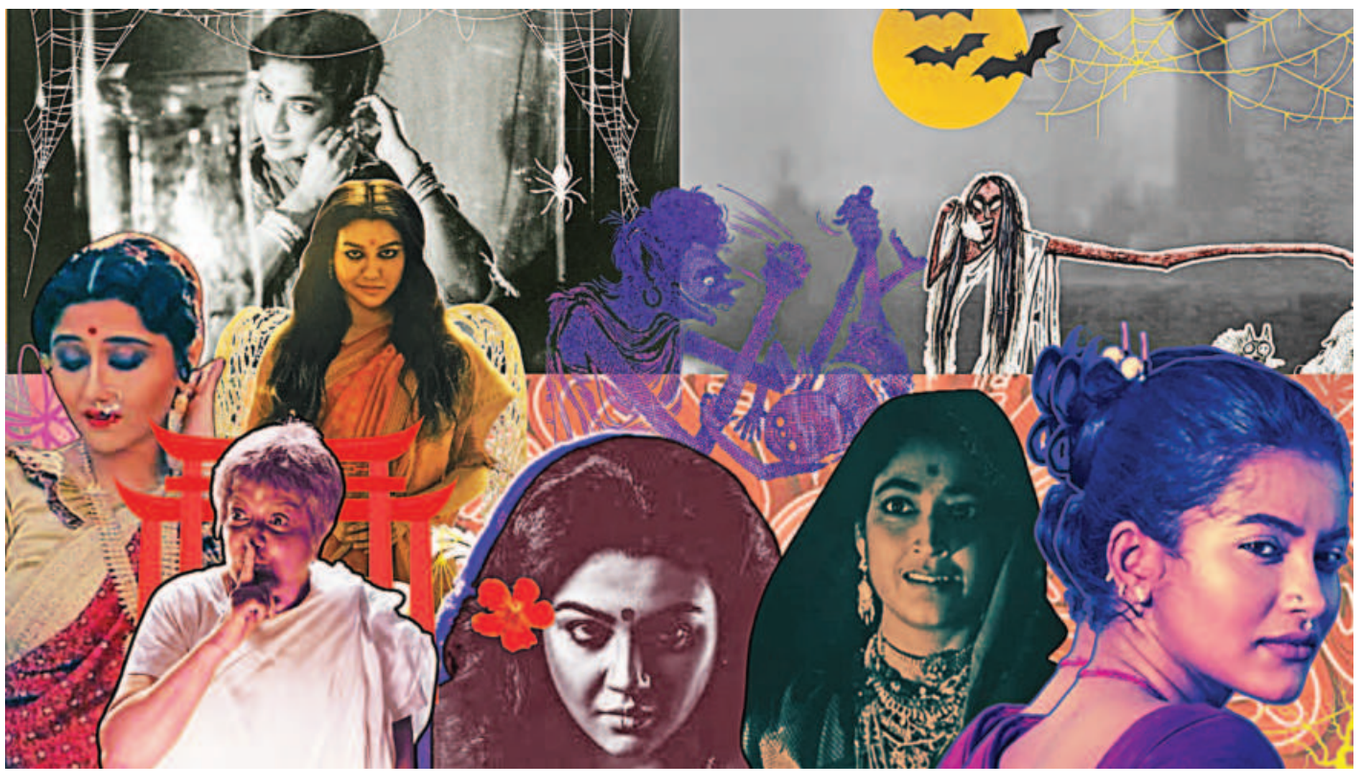
The women who haunt BANGLA CINEMA

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE



VISUAL: ANIKA TAHSIN HAFSA

In Bangla folklore, a woman can die and still remain trapped in the expectations that governed her life. She returns with unfulfilled desires, unfinished domestic duties, the memory of a marriage or the grief of a life cut short.

She lurks beside ponds, wanders through bamboo groves, waits beneath trees and appears on deserted roads after dark. Her hair is often long, her feet may point the wrong way and her presence brings terror to anyone unfortunate enough to encounter her. For generations, these women have haunted Bangla ghost stories. On-screen, they have become more than figures of fear, carrying the weight of social expectations and lives that never quite belonged to them.

Among Bengal's best-known female spirits are the *petni* and the *shakchunni*. A *petni* is often associated with a woman who died unmarried or met an untimely death, with some regional beliefs linking her to pregnancy, childbirth or menstruation. Often imagined near ponds and trees, she remains a familiar figure in Bangla folk horror. The *shakchunni*, by contrast, is linked to marriage. Named after the conch-shell bangles worn by married Hindu Bengali women, she is often portrayed as a married woman who returns after death to reclaim the domestic life she lost, sometimes taking the place of a living wife.

The *daini*, or witch, is often imagined as an older woman whose independence, knowledge or behaviour makes her an object of suspicion. In Bangladeshi horror, *daini buri* evokes the frightening old woman of childhood tales, reflecting how age and appearance can turn a woman into a figure of fear. The *pishachini*, meanwhile, is generally portrayed as a dangerous female spirit or demon. Alongside the *daini*, she reflects cultural fears of women who challenge social expectations or are seen as threats to the established order.

Bangla cinema has explored these anxieties through women whose lives remain bound to marriage, wealth and domestic respectability even after death. Satyajit Ray's ***Monihara***, part of ***Teen Kanya***, centres on a woman whose attachment to jewellery shapes her haunting. The ornaments become remnants of an unfinished life, connecting the supernatural to the material expectations placed on women within marriage.

these women return to the places where their stories were misunderstood or silenced, reminding us that their haunting extends beyond the supernatural.

In ***Goynar Baksho***, a dead aunt and her treasured jewellery expose the precarious position of a widow within her family. Pishima's ghostly presence brings humour and bite to a social order that measures a woman's security through property and inheritance. Here, jewellery becomes more than a possession; it represents a woman's claim to identity and security within the family.

A contemporary variation appears in Soukarya Ghosal's ***Bhootpori***, where a dead widow befriends a young boy. Rather than presenting its ghost solely as a source of terror, the film brings widowhood and social exclusion into a supernatural narrative, giving its central figure warmth, humour and a history beyond fear.

In ***Bhooter Bhabishyat***, Kadalibala, the ghost of an actress, brings another dimension to the cinematic archive of female haunting. Her story draws attention to the precarious lives of women in entertainment, where reputation and public judgement can shape a woman's future. Through her, the haunting extends beyond marriage and domesticity to encompass work, fame and social standing.

Bangladeshi cinema offers its own variations. In ***Debi***, Anam Biswas's adaptation of Humayun Ahmed's novel, Ranu, played by Jaya Ahsan, experiences disturbing visions and appears to possess a supernatural sensitivity that the psychologist Misir Ali tries to understand. Though not a conventional ghost, she embodies the vulnerability of a woman whose experiences are interpreted, questioned and doubted by others. Her story connects the supernatural with trauma and memory, asking what happens when a woman's experiences fall outside the explanations available to those around her.

In ***Hawa***, Mejbaur Rahman Sumon places the mysterious Gulti in an isolated, male-dominated world at sea. Her presence unsettles the men aboard a fishing boat, while maritime folklore blurs the boundaries between the human and supernatural. Though she is neither a conventional *petni* nor a *shakchunni*, the men's reactions turn her presence into a source of fear and uncertainty.

Together, these films show how Bangla cinema draws on folklore to explore changing social fears. From the *petni* and *shakchunni* to the *daini* and ghostly widow, these figures carry the weight of expectations surrounding marriage, family and women's place in society.

Their power lies not only in their ability to frighten audiences, but also in the histories they preserve. Through cinema, these women return to the places where their stories were misunderstood or silenced, reminding us that their haunting extends beyond the supernatural.

TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix
The One About Matthew Perry



HBO Max
The Gilded Age



Hulu
The Drop: A Snowfall Saga



Prime Video
The Greatest



Apple TV+
Stick



OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA

'Non-duality'
October 30–November 10, 2026| 3:00–9:00 pm
Alliance Française de Dhaka, Dhanmondi



'Art Dhaka 2026'
November 6–10, 2026 | 9:00am- 12:00pm
Aloki, Dhaka



'Café de Volte'
November 20, 2026 | 6:00pm and 8:00pm
Jatra Biroti, Banani





TV TALKIES

'Carrie'

Carrie **is a supernatural horror series based on Stephen King's novel of the same name. The story follows Carrie White, a socially isolated teenager who struggles to fit in at her new school after spending years under the strict control of her deeply religious mother, Margaret. As Carrie faces relentless bullying from her classmates, she begins to discover her telekinetic powers, which allow her to move objects with her mind. As her powers grow, tensions rise and her life takes a terrifying turn.** ***Carrie*** **is now available to stream on Amazon Prime Video.**



WHAT'S PLAYING

'Thriller' by Michael Jackson

Michael Jackson's ***Thriller*** turns the atmosphere of a horror film into a dance-pop classic. Released in 1982 as the title track of his sixth studio album, the song follows a night filled with supernatural threats, fear and suspense. Written by Rod Temperton and produced by Quincy Jones, it blends a funky bassline, dramatic sound effects and Jackson's distinctive vocals to create an eerie yet danceable track.

The song's theatrical mood reaches its peak with a spoken-word passage by horror actor Vincent Price, whose chilling narration and sinister laugh remain among its most recognisable features. The accompanying 1983 music video, directed by John Landis, brought the song to life with elaborate make-up and its iconic zombie dance. Decades later, ***Thriller*** remains a defining moment in pop music.

STYLE STATEMENT

Tom Rhys Harries

Tom Rhys Harries has a way of making unconventional dressing look incredibly effortless. His personal style strikes a balance between relaxed masculinity and contemporary elegance, moving from sharply tailored suits to oversized silhouettes without losing its distinctive edge. His tousled hair and minimal accessories add to the appeal, giving his look a distinctly British, slightly rebellious character. It's this mix of individuality, understated confidence and sartorial experimentation that makes his style so compelling.

