

RAHUL ON 12 YEARS OF JOLER GAAN

COVER STORY

Rafi: Welcome to *Uncensored* with Rafi Hossain, today we are with Rahul Das. Initially I thought your name was Rahul Roy.

Rahul: It probably got stuck within your head for some reason. People mainly know me as Rahul Ananda.

Rafi: Rahul, 12 years of 'Joler Gaan' have passed. Tell us about the origin of 'Joler Gaan', and please do share some memorable moments?

Rahul: We came up with the name *Joler Gaan* in 2006. But, long before that Kanak and I used to play music together after we both enrolled in *Charukola*. We hit it off because of music, and we used to sing and play instruments together. Music was the catalyst of our strong friendship. After some time, we performed all over *Charukola*. We would go there in groups and perform. Once our group, consisting of 22 people performed at *Charukola's Bakultola Moncho*. During festivals like *Boishakh*, we would just use our tables like percussion instruments and sing. It started in the morning, and would last till nightfall. Many groups would perform one after the other. It was like a musical gauntlet. Every batch of *Charukola* had people that could play instruments or write and compose songs. That way, we could all just sing songs together. Kanak and I always wanted to create a musical group, and in 2006, we officially started *Joler Gaan*.

Rafi: Who came up with the name?

Rahul: I came up with the name. We were once performing on *Charukola's* roof when an organizer from the *Edinburgh Festival* came and checked us out. After some time, he sought us out and asked us to perform. When he asked for our name, we realized that we needed to find one, and we selected *Joler Gaan*.

Rafi: What was the inspiration behind the name?

Rahul: Since we are Bangladeshi, I wanted our name to be in our native language. As Bangladesh is a riverine country, *Joler Gaan* seemed appropriate. Syed Shamsul Haq wrote in *Amar Porichoy* about how Bangladesh had over 1300 rivers. Sundarban apparently has over 450 rivers alone! Bangladesh has a rich geological landscape consisting a lot of water bodies. For example, during monsoon certain areas are flooded, with the only mode of transportation being boats. However, during winter, that exact area will be yellow because of all the mustard plants. Water shapes our geological landscape, and it changes the dynamic of our country. We also spend nine months in our mothers' wombs, consisting of water. Hence, *Joler Gaan*. Water is also something that has many names based on where it is, like when we see water falling from a mountain, we call it a waterfall, when it joins other waterfalls and flows through land, we call it a river, when that river joins with other rivers and goes into a larger body of water, we call it a sea. Even when

water evaporates, it becomes a gaseous state, when that condenses into liquid and precipitates, we call it rain. When we cry, we have tears dropping, but when similar droplets perspire from our bodies, we call it sweat. These entities have one common aspect, water. Due to its context, it has so many different names. Hence why, we are *Joler Gaan*.

Rafi: Do you mainly write the songs for 'Joler Gaan'?

Rahul: I have written most songs. But, when we first started Shawon Akand was our main writer. He studied with us at *Charukola*. We have also done two songs written by our untimely departed friend Sanjibon. We dedicated three songs to him. Aside from these, we don't require anyone else to write any songs. These days, most of the songs are written by me.



Rafi: While hearing your songs, I felt like they are mainly about observing nature and peoples' lives up close. Did you originally start with that kind of writing philosophy, or did that come later?

Rahul: The writing philosophy regarding loving nature was there from the very beginning. It may have been a result of studying at *Charukola*. While studying there, you are bound to fall in love with nature. And usually nature-loving people are the ones that enroll in *Charukola*. We used to get assignments there like observing the flora and fauna. We had to sit and observe the colours, shapes and diminutive movements very carefully. We studied at *Charukola* for a long time. We enrolled in 1994 and finished in 2004. We studied there for so long, so we should be able to

resemble that in our work. Shawon and I both had similar mentality. We used to think, "If nature can be expressed using art, why can't it be expressed with words?" After creating *Joler Gaan*, Kanak and I would regularly talk about this. We also talked about how it doesn't matter if we can make good songs or not, we would attempt to give Bangladesh a fresh soundscape. Shawon and I would also travel whenever we got a break from *Charukola*. We would travel with *Bauls*, live and converse with them. We stayed for a few days, then find other areas and stay with the *Bauls* there. This aided in my knowledge of the *Baul* culture more, and helped me learn more about our beautiful country. We discovered the love and affection the people have in our country through our travels. We encountered people who would give us something to eat even if they didn't have

anything. This love, that they have for one another shook me. Once I went to a house with the intention to stay one night, and leave the next morning. But come morning, the hosts insisted I have lunch with them. After lunch, they urged me to spend the night since it was almost dark. I ended up spending seven days with them! One thing this has taught me, that people in this country may be sick and hungry, but doesn't stop them from spreading happiness, love and joy. Many people think that Dhaka is Bangladesh. But, truth be told, if you go 30-40 kilometres outside of Dhaka, is where the true Bangladesh reveals itself. People there love and respect everyone. They willingly do anything to help each other. I tried to learn that from them. It

Celebrating 12 years of 'Joler Gaan', we had a special sit down with the folk fusion band's leading lyricist, composer and vocalist, the ever-green Rahul Ananda. In conversation with Rahul, Star Showbiz goes deep into the roots of the band's origins, dating all the way back to Rahul's early days in 'Charukola'. He shares an exclusive on the creation of the now infamous 'Joler Gaan' and his insight on the 'Baul' culture of Bangladesh.

taught me to love my country and its people. I hope that everyone in this country will pass their days with a smile on their faces.

Rafi: Some people seem to have a disliking for band-music. How do you see band-music?

Rahul: When a single performer sings, we call it solo. When two people do it, it's called duo. For three people, it's trio. But for four or more, we call it a band. For groups of four or more, band is the only term we use. From my childhood, I have seen musical groups performing. By definition, *bauls* perform in groups. Isn't that a band too? My father's paternal grandmother would compose her own songs and perform with a musical group. That's a band too. If someone performs Tagore songs while a group plays *Tabla*, keyboard, *Sitar* or even violin alongside them, that can be called a band too. My question to the ones that express this disliking for band music is: what do they mean by 'band music'? What kind of music are they referring to dislike? I feel like many people start this because they do not know enough. And those who say that this is against our culture, who are they to say what our culture is? Culture changes with time; it cannot be kept halted throughout generations. Say, if Rabindranath was born now, would the writings be the same? It would adjust with the culture. He would write everything on his computer, and he would even have a *Facebook* account! You would just run into him at a café, he would have regular talk show segments. I wonder that if we don't adapt art to our current times, what was the point of being born in this time? We should show our current times in art, but should not completely forget the past.

Rafi: Do you divide music by different types, or regard it as a whole? And where do you think Bangla music is headed?

Rahul: Music is an abstract form of art. I have studied at *Charukola* for a long time. I have been involved with music since my childhood. I work with music now, and will continue to do so. I have tried making my own instruments, and have experimented with different types of music. From all this, I have learnt that every type of art touches music. Music is the thing that finds the beauty in everything. The sound may be different, but it's still music. People express everything in abstract form at first. When someone is born, the first thing they do is cry. They do not know why, but everyone cries after being born. People have a desire to express themselves. Even before people created languages, they expressed themselves. We can see in cave paintings that people are dancing around a fire. They did not have a language, but they had music. They had celebrations, and a major part of that is music. I don't divide music. I regard all types of music as a whole.

Rafi: We can see many bands starting with friends who care for each other, but after a few years they cannot stand each other. Do you think this happens all over the world, or does it happen here more?

Rahul: This happens all around the world. This is because a band is a group project. Even if two best friends form a band, they are bound to disagree on things. It is normal for people to disagree on things. No two people can agree on everything.

Rafi: Why does this happen, because of personality clashes?

Rahul: This happens due to many reasons. I have been working in this industry for a long time. I have seen a lot of people come and go. I have performed with almost 15-16 different people in *Joler Gaan*. Many people assume that it's only because of personality clashes. But, a lot of other factors also come into play. A lot of personal problems happen, many people just cannot continue and others just are not good enough. Music is not an art you can neglect. You have to constantly be with music all the time, and practice it regularly. When someone doesn't have that desire to practice till they are perfect, they cannot continue. And when you just aren't good enough, you will notice. As a result, you yourself will just move away from it.

Rafi: 12 years of 'Joler Gaan' has passed. Now, do you have any specific plans for the future?

Rahul: I don't have any specific plan, but my only plan is to continue what I am doing now. My only desire is to inspire the new musicians in this country to perform. *Joler Gaan* has helped me get this message across. I want to tell the new musicians that they can all become musicians, they all can make music and make it big.

Rafi: You can never be seen using a drum kit during your performances, is that intentional?

Rahul: An instrument called *Cajon* can be seen all over Bangladesh now. People here can be seen playing it everywhere now. I can say it with pride that we were the ones that started this trend here. While I was in Brazil, I spent three months with musicians there. They introduced me to the *Cajon*. A drum kit requires over 12 mics, but a *Cajon* can do the same job with only one. I prefer to use it because it makes the band much more portable. Many people say that they will not use it as it is too western. But the thing is, no instrument can be fixed to a certain country. Take for example; I have seen the *Ektara* being played in Latin America and even Africa. You cannot just say that an instrument is owned by a specific region. A *Tabla* or a *Dhol* is a kind of drum. It's silly to not accept it. I like to try using all kinds of different instruments. I have no issue using all types of musical instruments.

Rafi: I think we had a great discussion about music today, and I really enjoyed talking to you. Thank you Rahul, it was great having you with us.

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Transcribed by Ridwan Intisaar Mahbub

