#NOSTALGIA



BHOOT FM:

Defining late-night Friday nostalgia for a generation

For thousands of listeners across Bangladesh, turning off the lights on Friday at midnight was a cherished ritual. The terrifying tales told on Bhoot FM left a lasting mark on pop culture and childhood memories.

Launched in 2010, the show brought alleged paranormal encounters from across the country to the airwaves, with Md Asraful Alam, better known as RJ Russell, lending his voice to stories that made listeners question what might be lurking just beyond the darkness.

AN UNUSUAL IDEA AT MIDNIGHT

Bhoot FM began with a simple idea: radio did not always have to follow the usual format of short segments interrupted by advertisements and music. Alam and his colleagues wanted something that could run continuously, giving listeners time to settle into a story without interruption.

"We selected the time of Friday 11:59 pm, as there were no ads then, and we could hold it live for a long period of time," Alam recalls.

The format was unusual, particularly for a horror show. Yet, the timing soon became part of the experience. With the show beginning just before midnight, listeners were already "experiencing the dark" when the stories began. And once an episode ended, the fear did not necessarily end with it.

"The same story might not have the same effect on you if you listen to it in daytime," Alam says. "At night, you listen; after listening, you have to sleep alone, or you might have to go to the washroom alone. The fright kicks off at that time."

What began as a practical decision



about scheduling turned into a defining feature of the show. For many, Friday nights became synonymous with Bhoot FM, and the anticipation was as much a part of the experience as the stories themselves.

THE STORIES, AND THE VOICE THAT TOLD THEM

Alam admits that the team did not expect Bhoot FM to become as popular as it did. The format was new, and the response surprised them. Listeners began sending in their experiences, while others tuned in week after week to hear what would come next.

For Alam, the appeal went beyond the subject of ghosts. He had always been interested in storytelling and horror, and he believes that genuine enthusiasm made a difference in how the programme connected with its audience.

"People resonate with that kind of originality," he says. "They sense when someone is doing it only for the profession and when someone is genuinely interested."

Among the experiences he remembers, one stands out even after nearly a decade. A man once came to the studio before the show began to share his story. He claimed that after feeding a beggar on the street at night, he had developed an unusual ability to sense what other people were thinking and knew things about them without understanding how.

It was the sort of encounter that stayed with Alam long after the broadcast. "It's been almost a decade since that, and I still haven't forgotten it," he says.

Stories like these gave Bhoot FM a steady stream of material, but the show's appeal also depended on how they were presented. Alam was not simply reading accounts into a microphone. He was guiding listeners through them, building anticipation and allowing the details to do their work.

WHEN A RADIO SHOW BECAME A CULTURAL MEMORY

The popularity of Bhoot FM eventually followed Alam beyond the studio. Yet, as he points out, radio presenters often work in the background, recognised by their voices rather than their faces. His experience with Bhoot FM was different.

One night, on his way to the studio, Alam stopped at a grocery shop. A man pushed past him and urged the shopkeeper to serve him first because he needed to get home quickly to listen to Bhoot FM.

The encounter stayed with Alam. It was an unexpected reminder that people were not merely familiar with the programme. They were organising parts of their lives around it.

Bhoot FM went off air in 2019, leaving behind years of stories and a loyal audience. Alam says he initially wondered what he would do next after such a large part of his life came to an end. He eventually decided to leave mainstream radio and begin a new chapter rather than return to the same platform.

BEYOND BHOOT FM

The end of Bhoot FM did not mean the end of Alam's interest in horror storytelling. He now hosts Bhoot.com.bd, continuing to share stories through a different platform. He is also preparing to launch an app that will allow people from around the world to submit their experiences.

For Alam, the medium matters less than the person and the idea behind it. Asked whether a show like Bhoot FM could achieve similar popularity today, in an era of podcasts, YouTube and social media, he returns to the same principle that guided him from the beginning.

"No matter the platform, it needs to be original, and the person doing it needs to be passionate about it," he says.

Perhaps that is part of what made Bhoot FM last in people's memories. The show gave listeners a reason to stay awake, a reason to be frightened and, often, a story to share the next morning. Alam supplied the voice that brought those experiences into their homes.

Years later, the show may no longer occupy the Friday midnight slot, but for those who grew up listening, the memory of that voice is still there.

By Mehdi Islam Mahi
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