

## Of love, ghosts, and *Path Gechhe Bñeke*.

- Neil Mukherjee/Aniruddha Bose

The mid-nineties saw the Indian economy opening up. We witnessed pagers, cell phones, foreign brands taking a hold of our lives. As we came of age, we saw Maruti and Premier Padminis in addition to the Ambys and Fiats. Yamaha, Honda, Kawasaki in addition to Bajaj, Enfield and Yezdi bikes plied our streets with a whole lot of pride. Time was changing like it always does. The economic disparity increased, and we witnessed a very nascent form of multinational corporate colonization. As a result, many of us could not identify with any of the political and economic ideologies that existed at that time, be it left, right or the center.

We decided to go our way and found music and internal strife of the psyche as something more relevant to address. The world of sensuality, sexuality, frustrations, hopes, despair, ambitions, desires, anger, greed, passion, love, abuse, hate became the metaphors of our creativity. But continually addressing psychological strife came with a devastating cost of using recreational drugs and alcohol. Thus, were born songs which dealt with the looming uncertainty, lost love, wrong steps taken, lessons learnt, the never-ending search and the hope to be bewildered someday. It was a time when Fm radio stations started cropping up in Indian cities broadcasting a pretty stereo sound. MTV and other channels had entered the Indian air waves playing international music videos and some of our homegrown stuff. That's a rough semantic sketch of the times I was writing songs of *Poth Gechche Benke*.

Kolkata clubs, education institutional festivals and some odd corporate gig somewhere would keep our fires of day-to-day existence burning. We were playing top forty music in clubs satiating needs of the colonially hungover Kolkata. Obviously, we had to be good at mimicking. It was more important to sound like someone famous than be looking for one's own sound. The bands mostly played covers barring High who were an inspiration to many of us who played music.

I was privileged to be born in a family where music, poetry, arts, science, social activism and feudalism converged. A Mother with great musical, literary and culinary abilities was my first listener and critic. A father sailing the seven seas exposed me to songs from far off lands. A sister with a great musical taste guided my listening as a child. My childhood experiences of the Sunderbans were extremely beautiful. Rural Bengal, folk culture, local social practices, the pristine delta, rivers, all night Jatras, coconut trees, banana stem boats (bhyala) mangrove

forests all had a deep impact. I still have a beautiful memory of Moindor'da singing "Guru na bhoji mui" rowing the boat on river Bidya, as the red sun set. These are treasures. Such were the formations of my mind which later came out as music and lyrics.

Within my extended family I saw *Mohiner Ghoraguli* performing in the seventies, a scientist going on expeditions to Antarctica, a physics professor giving us unparalleled happiness with his gypsy magic tricks. I lived with a paternal grandfather, a lawyer, an ardent follower of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar who married into a Brahma family to be eventually ousted by his own in the 1920 s. Met Dipak Majumdar through family, a brilliant author, poet and an iconoclast. I was the family black sheep naturally interested in sports and music and never enough in studies. The Bengali middle class is ruthless when it comes to success in academics. So, I knew from early on what it felt to be an outsider. PGB is an outsider's look into life - not quite fitting in, not quite going out - sublimating unspoken horrors of the everyday into music.

At the time I was listening, practicing and living music that came from the west. Rock n roll, Flamenco, Bach, blues, psychedelia , jazz occupied my musical consciousness. Simultaneously demolition of the Babri, the Mandal commission immolations, perennial unemployment and corruption getting drowned in the drumbeats of the newly found open economy and promises of increased buying power, also influenced my existence. I was never an active participant in any political discourse, but the sound bytes of social angst did influence me unconsciously. It took its place in the songs I wrote, and the music I composed.

The first Bangla song I wrote was *O Mon*. This recording featured Bonnie on vocals Tuki playing the guitar solo Dwight on bass, Chiro on drums and myself playing the guitar keyboards and on backing vocals. *Ghum bhange* arrived one morning after a night of sleeplessness. The recording featured Bonnie's brilliant singing, Tuki's phenomenal fretless bass, Chiro's memorable drums and Dwight's significant guitar solo in the middle. I played the nylon guitar intro, keyboards and sang harmonies. Amaresh Chakraborty contributed a lyric line in this song. Can't remember exactly how or exactly when I wrote *Poth Gechche Benke*. Bonnie sang and played the congas. Chiro designed the shakers and clave while Dwight played bass. Tuki and I played the rhythm guitars, and I played the nylon string guitar solo. Wrote and composed *Kachche Esho* in five minutes flat. It's the only song I sang in the album. I played electric guitar. Tuki played the electric guitar solo. Chiro was on drums and Dwight played the bass. I did play keyboard parts which Tuki suggested. *Awbak* happened in five minutes too. The recording featured

Bonnie on vocals and percussion, me and Tuki doing our guitar duties, Dwight on Fretless bass. Tuki played the guitar solo.

I don't remember how *Kawto doorey* happened. This was the first song we recorded in the studio. Bonnie sang, Chiro played drums, Dwight played bass, Tuki and I played electric guitars. I played the slide guitar solo. I had composed the head of *Elo melo haowa* and the band jammed it out with individual guitar and bass solos. It is a recorded example of our individual and collective musical brilliance. Thus were the six songs and an instrumental born but we needed eight-ids for the album. *Ei dingulo* was written in the studio just before the take and probably explains why the song reeks phenomenally of mediocrity. But it was a song we enjoyed recording and was a relief from our otherwise intense compositions. Bonnie sang Tuki and I played electric guitar. Chiro was the drummer and Dwight the bass player. I played keyboards and dared to record a solo in it too. I remember Amyt Dutta lending his Fretless bass for the PGB sessions. Ephraim Isaacs was ever present with his fabulous listening skills and sound engineering expertise to sculpt the final recording which many enjoyed. Shivaram Hariharan paid for the recording unconditionally. Robin Lai played the most important part. He got us the recording deal.

In hindsight, it's a lot of fun to reminisce, but in 1996 we were merely a bunch of twenty somethings who were experimenting with a sound character that had not happened in the Bengali music before. I say this fully acknowledging the collective that was *Mohiner Ghoraguli*. No wonder *Prithibi* had the Krosswindz sound. I don't think I overstate the importance of our soundscape if I claim PGB to be one of the heralds of Bangla rock on this side of the Raimongol.

PS: 1. I don't like the moniker Bangla rock. 2. *Prithibi* was written and composed by Goutam Chattopadhyay. 3. PGB is Poth Gechche Benke.