

**Breaking out of the Underground:  
A highly biased and personal commentary on the re-birth of  
Rock and Metal Music in Bangladesh since 2000**

**By Chowdhury F. Shakib**

First of all let me give the disclaimer that this is a very personal account of what happened to the underground scene since the year 2000. As with Arafat, I may leave out many important events or state things the wrong way, in which case please be indulgent because all this is written from memory. I will mainly touch on events that had an impact on the underground scene, and also on my own band.

The most significant thing that happened in 2000 was a concert arranged by Rahat Bhai (aka Joy bhai) in the BCIC auditorium. This was the first time Aurthohin played with the metal crowd. I think Artcell, Koprophilia were also there in that show. Plus X-uranium, for which Kamal bhai played guest guitarist. Later Shumon bhai told us that before that show he was always under the impression that the metal crowd in Dhaka were all drug pushing scumbags with long lice-filled hair and very little talent, but in that show he actually got to interact with all of us and also see us live. And that changed his opinion of all of us. And thus the movement was born. With Shumon Bhai on the bandwagon, and also with the release of Aurthohin's first album, we started getting bigger audiences in shows. Those of you who have gone to concerts before 2002 know that most shows were not sold-out. Invariably the bands themselves would go and sit in the audience during the show in order to fill up space. Fortunately, that is no longer possible in most shows today. One of my happiest moments was in a show in Russian Cultural Center where after our performance I had to sit on the floor in front of the stage and watch Artcell play, because there simply was no place to sit!

The 2<sup>nd</sup> most significant thing in 2000 was the already mentioned Aurthohin album, Biborton. Not only is it significant because it heralded a new force in the music scene, it also marked G-series' re-entry in the Bangla band production business. I cannot stress the importance of this event enough. Those of you not aware of how an album is introduced in the market don't know how much a band has to sacrifice its ideals and dance to the producer's tune. But G-series, and its proprietor Khaled bhai, turned out to be completely different from the usual run of producers. A lot of you don't know that Fate's album

“Sreshtho” was recorded in 1997, but got released 5 years later. This is because all the other production houses simply refused to bring out a heavy metal album.

In 2001 two things of significance happened. The first was Cryptic Fate getting signed up by Pepsi. The second was the release of the mixed album Charpotro. Fate’s contract with Pepsi was significant because Fate then got to play with Big bands like LRB and Feelings in open air shows, thus giving a taste of heavy music to the mass people. Also, I was able to arrange sponsorship of the mixed album Charpotro through our contract with Pepsi. As a result Charpotro came out with a blitz of ads in the leading newspapers and also massive postering all around town. I don’t think any G-series product had been advertised like that before. Anyway, the 2<sup>nd</sup> most important occurrence of 2001 was the release of, you guessed it, Charpotro. Durey bhai of Soundgarden studio and Khaled bhai of G-series conspired together to shock the Bangladeshi music world by bringing out an album of completely new bands – bands people had never heard about, or if they had heard, had not seen. Durey bhai took the responsibility of choosing the bands and the rest is history.

Charpotro opened up a new world not only for music lovers but also for the musicians themselves. Although I had known Shumon Bhai and Artcell for a while, we weren’t really close. All that changed with Charpotro. Suddenly we had a band doing progressive rock (Artcell), a band doing excellent alternative (Black) and a band doing excellent traditional rock, with a keyboard solo to boot (Metal Maze). I also loved all the other songs in the album, especially the punk song by Srishti. I was amazed at the variety of talent that was in display in this album. And so was the rest of Bangladesh.

2002 saw the release of Anushilon and soon after, the first album of the new bands came out with Cryptic Fate’s Sreshtho. This was followed soon after with Black’s Amar Prithibi and Artcell’s Onno Shomoi. These 3 albums completely changed the color of Bangladeshi Rock music. Kids in schools and colleges were talking about these new bands, and were flocking by the hundreds to their shows. And all this was severely helped by Aurthohin’s 2<sup>nd</sup> album Biborton.

And in no time, the alternative scene also came into prominence in the underground through the sudden emergence of bands like Fullbanu’s Revenge, Nemesis, Ajob and many more. With so many kids into rock, so many kids clamouring for rock concerts, the authorities who control auditoriums and community centres found it impossible to keep saying

no to concert organizers. This is one big difference between "then" and "now". Before 2000, it was extremely difficult to organize shows because of the destruction wrought by the fans of LRB, Miles, Feelings and other popular bands in the auditoriums where the shows were held. Plus the Bangladeshi people were not used to the concept of rock concerts. That all changed after 2000, although how it changed I don't know. My only surmise is the growing popularity of Bangladeshi rock among kids whose fathers or brothers or uncles knew someone who knew someone who was great pals with the authority of an auditorium, and thus managed to get permission for a show.

So where do we go from here? On to bigger and better things definitely!! Not only in terms of music, but also in terms of packaging of the album itself. As of this writing, The Watson Brothers has come out with a 4-flap CD sleeve, with 4-color printing on both sides. Black is going to come out with a double CD pack (an audio CD and a video CD). Dinbodol, what to my mind is a "Charpotro 2", is coming out in the near future featuring 21 bands!!!! That's CRAZY!!! But it's happening. And the best thing about these 21 bands is that 17 of them are brand new!! So we have really good things to look forward to, and we will soon see the day when we are underground no more.