

Star People

September 04, 2015

## With Art in the Heart

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**Photo: Prabir Das**

When studying in Central Government High School, Rakibul Hasan Palash, realised that he only did well in subjects he enjoyed. “That is what my whole life was like. If I didn't enjoy math, I would fail horribly. If I enjoyed English, I would pass with flying colours. I even learned Russian within a week because I wanted to,” says Palash. Now, after many hurdles and obstacles overcome, Palash stands as one of the most talented self-taught cartoonist, currently working as an Art Director in Grey Advertising.

“After school, I discovered that I have a mild form of dyslexia, for which I cannot track time and timelines, which affected my schooling. Despite that, I enrolled myself in BRAC University to study Law after graduating out of Dhanmondi Ideal College.” But Palash caught himself doodling and drawing ever so often. Every time he saw pieces of art work, he wanted his own to match their perfection and precision. During his time in university, Palash's mother passed away. “Shortly after that, while pursuing my degree, I realised that after going through a huge financial crisis while my mother was suffering from cancer, I am now spending a lot of money on this degree. So I asked myself



whether this degree was worth all the money I was spending. The reply came to me in the negative,” Palash says.

During class one day, his professor asked the students which field of law they want to get into. Palash replied, “I just want to be a cartoonist,” and his response was met with laughter and ridicule, even from himself. But in his heart, he realised what he said was true.

He stopped pursuing LLB further and decidedly took up cartooning. “My biggest source of influence was social media! I learned everything I know from YouTube and practice,” he says. He soon contacted some well known cartoonists from Unmad, Bangladesh's first and longest running monthly satire magazine and was asked to submit a portfolio. “During that time, I drew a portrait of a freedom fighter. And when I saw what I produced, I couldn't believe it.” Palash's senior friend and freedom fighter himself, Golam Faruk, saw it and confirmed Palash's passion by affirming that this was what he was meant to do.

After submitting his portfolio to Unmad and meeting with the editor himself, Ahsan Habib, Palash started his work. His first publication in the magazine was a cover art drawn by him-- thus started his journey as a full-fledged cartoonist.

Soon after that, he joined Rosh Alo, a supplement by the Prothom Alo, and worked on illustrations for the paper and various books. After Rosh Alo, he was contacted by a cartoonist working in Grey Advertising, who told him about an open position. “Joining Grey was a very good decision on my part. It is like no other work place. If I take crazy ideas to my boss, he turns them into even crazier ideas!” says Palash. Through Grey, Palash took a workshop on Character Designing, and chose it as his field as a cartoonist. He has had his work published in many children's books, including Habuler Jolodushshu Jahaj by Mahbub Azad, and is currently working on a book to be published for children called Lee, by Aninda Rahman. Palash has also won 2 bronze medals in Srijan Samman, the only award ceremony to applaud the excellence in Bengali advertising, and his campaign for United Commercial Bank, titled Long Hands, was the first campaign from Bangladesh to ever become a finalist in the Pattaya Adfest.

“The best part about my job as a cartoonist is getting to know my characters. When I draw a character and sketch out his life, he becomes a living being to me. I know him personally then,” says Palash.

Through out his life, whenever someone asked about his degree, he did not pay heed. “If people want to call me 'inter-pass' (someone who passed intermediate schooling), they can. I don't mind. I do what I love and I am great at it. I have nothing to be ashamed of. I don't need a degree to prove my worth to anyone,” he says.

To the youth who want to pursue cartooning or anything out of the ordinary, Palash says, “If you want it very badly, make yourself believe that you are the only one who wants it so badly and no one's passion can compare to yours. Have this belief in your system, and no one can stop you!”