

Lucky Ali

Singer, Song-Writer

Season 5, Episode 15, Season Finale

Pankaj: Hi everyone, I'm Pankaj Mishra and you are listening to the outliers podcast. It's a podcast, a series of conversations with outliers.

I am thrilled to have Lucky Ali on this podcast. Lucky bhai, welcome to the podcast.

Lucky: Thank You, Sir. Thank you so much.

Pankaj: You know, I'll be honest with you, this album '*Sunoh*', for a generation of people like us, was not just music Lucky bhai, if I go back and remember. It was something else that touched us very deeply. It was something very nomadic. It was something that touched our souls in a very special way. So, if we were to start from there Lucky bhai, who were you then and who are you now? How have things changed?

Lucky: I think apart from the age, we are the same person, we grow up and, but ya it's been quite a journey since '*Sunoh*', it's been about some 26 years now. More than 26 years. But for us also it was a journey of discovery, of actually speaking out what you've been wanting to say instead of what was expected of me to say in terms of, first of all, most of the music that I heard as a child, I never really listened to the words, I listened to the music and the music is what used to affect my thinking, I used to like certain, you know, music can touch your soul.

The words I always sang wrong. Even if I sang a popular Hindi song from that time maybe which everyone at home sang, '*wahan kaun hai tera musafir, jaayega kahan*', I never knew the words at that time but I knew how the sound went and those are the things. Also, we were introduced to all these various types of art forms whether it was music or whether it was acting or whether it was stage, they were very much prominent in our growing up years and also in school I was part of the choir, the chorus in Mussoorie. For me that has been an expression of singing against the mountains or then waiting for it to come back and listening. That's how all of my music probably started and that's the spirit that I want to keep constant because **I am going to need that freedom of being able to express my music without being under any kind of pressure of time or space or, so it needs to be, when it has to be. It can't be when I want it to be. I don't control my own discovery of creativity.**

Pankaj: So well said Lucky bhai but music happened to you much later in your life, right? How did music happen to you? Can you talk a little bit about that?

Lucky: My dad was a film producer as well as a director and an actor, so at point in his career he started producing films and we had a lot of music directors who will come home and then they will make songs like '*Chote Nawab*' or '*Bhoot Bangla*' or '*Pati Patni*', these all happened at home and then from the home we go straight to the studio. These

interactions for me were only when I used to come back home from boarding school in Mussoorie. The mike and to be able to talk through a mike and then be heard in another room, my cousin would stand in the other room and we would whisper, you know that kind of thing. Then we were thrown out of the recording studio because we were probably making a mess. But you know those small, small things. Smiles from creative people, a smile is a very important thing, a smile itself is such a charity that allows people to grow and lot of older people smiled at me as a child and I believe that allowed me to grow, that's what I understand.

Pankaj: Lucky bhai, a lot of times who we become later in our lives it's based on so many things that we pick up while growing up. Things that touches us when we are growing up. You talked about music, that's fascinating to hear but how was growing up for you Lucky bhai? What are the things that you think shaped you in terms of who you've become today and who you'll become tomorrow?

Lucky: I don't think about tomorrow. I think about now. I pray for tomorrow that it should be good for everyone and everything and those kinds of things but things that are not in my control, I leave it in the Creator's hands because He has a plan. He has a definitive plan, not just random. But I am glad, I didn't control my childhood or where I went. I went from Bombay straight to Mussoorie when I was 2.5 years old so those are not things that I could control but there was always a sense of missing something or like a loss of probably, my home is over the hills, what am I doing here? Wanting to run over the hills to find my home. That kind of thing as a child. There were also some adventurous boys in school who did that and got caught and were shamed and all. Two of my friends, very close, Bhupinder Singh, you know, they ran away from school, *bachpane mein* and *unki shaamat hui thi* and you know those kind of things.

So, there was always a sense of loss and we Bombay boys used to stick together, Amanjeet Singh Chugh, myself, Jitendar Kapoor is from Delhi. After school was over, he would get dropped in Delhi and then we would take the train from Delhi and then go to Bombay. As children, you know, Bombay party, Calcutta party, Madras party, those kind of things. The times that we grew up, I think all of us, were blessed. I think we are still blessed except that in today's date people are more de-sensitised. There is too much of information and not even necessary information.

Pankaj: This nomad in you Lucky bhai. I think it's something that has been there for long. So, what do you seek?

Lucky: I had no choice in it. Now I find that I had no choice in that aspect of my life because there were so many events, like not normal kind of events. For some reason in school you would always be called out as, *'that's the actor's son'* and then the other children's parents would come and you would be called out from class just to be, it was more like always being on show for someone or the other. All the time I missed my parents because they would come to meet me by virtue of my parents but my parents were far away. I think that is what the loss was, or I felt, I don't know.

Pankaj: There is a certain, the nomadic journey that you are talking about and looking for something, in your music, the way you come across. You know you've chosen to be a recluse it appears from outside, right. I mean you are not the one chasing limelight. What

has that journey been for you Lucky bhai? What are some of the realisations that you can share with us?

Lucky: I had a choice to be in the film industry or whatever. My father always told me, *'beta, you can be anything you want'* and I didn't want to be all the things that everybody else wanted to be. I thought the easiest way out of it was that because I could sing so I was just making songs. For me, cinema was a journey to get into the real life outside, to use that experience like I worked on *oil rigs*, I cleaned carpets, I sold carpets, I bought and sold carpets and I made a loss. I was never cut out to be a businessman. But I could look at situations and actually see the whole scenario. I don't know how to explain. Like you see, *'Oh, this is about to happen'* and you know it happens, that generally. I don't know if it's about being grateful for your life which you don't have at home. Then life treats you to looking at aspects which are very special.

Pankaj: The other thing that touches people about your music Lucky bhai is that there is a soul in it. Sometimes it appears to be Sufism, sometimes it appears to be having deep soul in it. As a musician, is there a playbook?

Lucky: No, no, no, no. When you are singing music, when I am doing music, I am not trying to connect to God, to be very honest with you because you only connect to God through an actual dialogue of prayer with God and it has nothing to do with that you need external things to just talk to him. That's a prayer. Whereas in singing you are talking to people and you try to get a connection to see, *'Am I freak or do people think like me?'* because you come out feeling like a freak. What will people think, how am I singing? And many years of my life, I have had this fear because, I only released my first album when I was 36. That was because of fear like people don't like me, or people may not like me or what am I doing.

Pankaj: Lucky bhai one of the things that I have been really meaning to ask you is, what does success mean for you? How do you look at success because it will help a lot of us to understand your view about success and if there is something that we can learn from your journey and what you have learnt?

Lucky: Success is something that you will probably define after a person passes away, whether he was a successful person or not a successful person. Many people, many of us probably, let me put myself into that, I won't point fingers, when I first started out, I wanted to be successful. Successful meant having money, just do the same things, exactly like how dad was. Like dad was excessive in his success because you know, he had like 150 horses, you understand what I am saying. A very different kind of a life and it was self-made. It was not something that his father gave to him and before he died, he started distributing his wealth to other people, you understand.

Like the horses he gave to friends, there is this one car, that till now it's not there in India, it's called the Corvette Stingray which he gave to one of his old friends Abbas Jastan and there was a Jaguar which he had, which he gave to, what he started doing in the end of his life and I am glad that I saw that. He sat on this big farm of 187 acres and was alone on the farm that day and I was back from New Zealand and on my way to somewhere else with my wife and my baby boy and daughter, we were not living in India at that time,

we were living in New Zealand. I didn't really think that I would, what you call it because I grew up here and I thought that ultimately everybody is going out so even I will go out.

So, I lived in America, I worked on horse farm in Kentucky and then all those experiences that you see in the movies like the funny experiences of Ranjeet Chowdhry, all those things happened, a Bible thumb is coming in and preaching to you the Bible and Indians are basically the kind of people who always are very accommodating. Yes, yes, *ji* and that was what my character felt like in all of America at that time when I worked on the horse farm, yes, yes, yes but then I realised that's not my life and that not where I belong. I worked with horses and my father had horses. For me that was just a training to take care of the horses here in India and Bangalore on the horse farm but when I came here my father was closing up the business. It was just like, now what do I do? Then Farooq Rattonsej and Mahesh Bhatt and my uncle were making a film called '*Kaash*' and I had just fresh come out from America at that time. They said will you act in the film? I said ya and that's what I thought I would do but the next that happened was that my brother Jackie, he was in the film.

Anyways, they did that and then I felt that am I really going to do this and then I went and worked with Shyam Babu, Discovery of India. For me, Discovery of India was going through all of India's history in all those years that I worked with Shyam Babu, right from the beginning. Then I did a film called '*Susman*' with Shyam Babu because Shyam Babu was an institution by himself. So, Shyam Babu is from Andhra, so we used to spend about 45 days there, so it was like more tour of the place and we used to shoot in Pochampally and that has been my general journey and then I realised that, I remember that my cousin brother said that now you should do commercial films so you make money because Shyam Babu *ke paas* nobody really makes money. You are getting educated and that kind of education you should pay a lot of money for, for what all of us had. It was big school, you know there was Kulbushan ji, there was Om ji, so many people, when I think of it now. It was just like a school.

Anyways, there came a time where I had to either start making money because I wanted to get married and my girlfriend was at that time said that if you don't have a job, I can't get marries to you. That was the scene. But nobody wants to marry an actor or an actor's family son specially traditional people in my community. *Sharam aati hai logo ko, yaar aap actor ho*, so that was another thing for me like *yaar, izzat bhi nahi hai*, that kind of a thing. For me *izzat* meant going and learning whatever we learnt with Shyam Babu. I am glad I made that decision as a student.

I didn't want to waste my life after America. I mean if we didn't have the farm, the horse farm and all that stuff, then there was something that I needed to do, just can't be sitting around anywhere so I chose meeting Shyam Babu and working with him. Then we did Trikal, I did Discovery of India, all was Shyam Babu and he used to allow me to go to the editing room to check out footage and all that stuff of all the earlier films that they made, the technique of making films and stuff like that. That was something that I knew because we came from a film background and to have that access and that opportunity was something very good for me.

Then, there came a point where after discovery of India, one of our very close associates died in that Bangalore plane crash, Mandeep Kakkad. He was handling Shyam Babu's

this thing. It was a big devastation in the whole unit when Mandeep ji expired. By that time I had decided that I need another job as I cannot sustain myself and by that time Discovery of India had finished so they were doing other projects or whatever.

So, I found a job on an oil rig off the coast of Pondicherry because I needed that freedom of being able to choose. So there was this a company called Great Eastern Shipping company in Chennai and they were working with a company called Atwood Oceanics, some American company. I liked the name Atwood Oceanics so I joined that. I went for the interview and all that stuff and my first trip was from Chennai port to Pondicherry by boat, so I went by boat. *Baaki log to helicopter se aate the* on the oil rig and there, there was ONGC and ONGC was digging for oil off the coast of Pondicherry. So, I used to be there for 28 days and then 28 days off and then 28 days and then 28 days off and made good money. I liked that.

But, then I started looking for prospects for my career, what will be my career there. So there was one Sardar Bhai ji out there and he was a crane operator there and I asked him, I said '*man, beyond this what happens?*'. So, he said '*you know how many days it took me to become a crane operator?*' Some 10-12 years of that poor chap's life was spent in trying to become a crane operator and that was very depressing for me. You know, I don't want to end up as a crane operator. I need to do things. I had taken my guitar to the oil rigs so I used to go on the helipad and sing my songs. So that's where I started making *Sunoh*. You understand, that's where it all started. *Raat Chandni* on the oil rigs. *Toh who hua then achcha humare community mein tum gaana gaao toh galat hai. Aap samajh le meri baat, haraam hai. Tab who darr dusra, ki ab yeh karo toh haraam, who nahi karo toh baap gaali deta hai,* you understand that kind of a thing.

But then I had to choose one thing and stick with it. This was the lesser of the two evils I would say, singing so I moved out of the film industry and gave my pledge to my father, I will look after the farm, I will take care of it, I promise. I won't mess it up, etc. which I am doing anyways. I kept my promise and then I sought a career in music. We had '*Sunoh*'. '*Sunoh*' went well and then I thought the next thing would be to again go back to the music company. They sign you and then fortunately for me I had not signed off my performing rights. All of these musicians have signed off their performing rights so they can't perform without paying the company, *ki aap gaa rahe ho, aap apna hi gaana gaa rahe ho, par aapko 30% dene padte hain. Ek ek gaane ke peechey bees bees hazaar rupay khud ke dene padte hain. Toh yeh hai funda film industry ka aur music industry ka. Toh hum uss mein se bache the, hum phase nahi uske andar.* So I was able to travel and do music and not take permissions from IPRS that I am singing my songs and where IPRS ka situation tha, *toh maine woh gaane gaaye hi nahi kyunki humare itne gaane release ho rahe hain.* I would not sing those songs because *kahin T-Series aake bolega, you owe us money ulta* and then I started getting tired also of the same line of gigging. 12 years of traveling all over India. I have gone length and breadth of India. Strange places and play the music but we never did for money, we did it for fun and somehow I felt that I want to now stop, after November-December, *ki abhi bas karna* and start recording again so I can release new music *kyunki jitney bhi gaane mere paas pade huey hain* they are partly completed, not completed, *shuru kiya hai, some voice nahi daala hai, aisa hai.* So this is what I am doing basically, trying to see that we can finish of our music. Doing what we are supposed to do. Finish it off. *Achchi tarah se sabki duaayein leke chalo.*

Pankaj: That's so nice to hear Lucky bhai. One more thing that I wanted to understand from you and your journey Lucky bhai, is that, *humne success ki baat ki hai*, and a lot of us get consumed by what we think of success but the journey also has failures, the journey has disappointments.

Lucky: Ya, **if you don't fail, you will not succeed.** Remember that. You have to fail. There cannot be just success. If you've had a very successful run, you will fail badly *kyunki* you jumped right, you came right from the top so your fall will also be like that but if you came struggling from down, you have a time that you can spend, wherever you spend, but also **remember that there are other people also climbing and you give them respect while you're are climbing so that when you go down, people respect you.** You are not really going down, you either **make a place for yourself** underneath the sun or **if you have to climb down then the people who are walking up and whom you passed by and they love you and they give you the honour and the respect when you are going down. It's just a cycle of things. It's just a circle.**

Pankaj: Lucky bhai what is your source of staying sane? *Matlab itna* diverse experience *raha hai aapka*. You have travelled the world, you have had your own experiences with life. Is there something that keeps you sane? What is your first principle in that sense which keeps you, whether it is failure, success or are you discovering it or do you have one? What is that talisman, if I may ask?

Lucky: I think that nature only will say what ultimately a person becomes or what ultimately a person is. A person to go and say *ki bhaiyya, main ka ghar khaali hota hai, yaad rakhna*. Don't say anything, just do, what you have to do, whether anybody understands it, doesn't understand it. You are not taking *shabaashi*. You own a peaceful night's sleep. You know you are going to die one day. I don't want to come back on this earth again. *Main toh aane hi nahi waala hun waapis*.

Pankaj: Success can also be intoxicating, *uska ek nasha hota hai*. *Toh jab aapki pehli album 'Sunoh' thi*, it became such a hit. It was such a rage.

Lucky: I know but I didn't feel it, I didn't know it, I didn't really know it, I didn't even know how famous I was or how famous I am even now. Whether I am or I am not. These things are not important because if these things were important then I would be pursuing them. I sit where what would have been given me, I have been macked out in my farm, this is where I sit, this is what I try to make beautiful.

Pankaj: Lucky bhai one more thing I want to understand from you, people talk about life and death in different terms. Its almost like we don't think about them or we are not accepting it.

Lucky: Well, death will come. Death has to come. There is no immortality for us not on this earth at least. There is a journey beyond this earth and this is after this life otherwise why would we age, why would we grow old, grow sick because there is a journey that you have to finish here. You know, it looks very beautiful but actually what looks peaceful is actually murky, what looks near is actually very far away. You could spend your whole life time just after one thing and realise man I have spent my whole life and where I am. I am

right in the place where I started. Can you understand what I am trying to say and what did I achieve, what is success then?

Pankaj: What is legacy then? For example, how would you like to be remembered as and I don't wish that?

Lucky: I don't want to be remembered and I don't even care if people remember me. It's not important. These things are not important. What's important is, you won't remember my face a 100 years from now, you will remember me in your heart as how I made you feel. Not for any other thing. You are not going to say that, nobody knows *yaar* and nobody has the time. *Andhe hain log, hum sab andhe hain, andhe hi rehne chahiye kyunki* what is ignorance is bliss. If you knew what crazy things that we can even see in the sky if we looked up. I posted a picture yesterday on my Facebook, tell me can you deal with that picture because that's the reality right from here. It's not just some small thing, *aata ram, jaata ram*. It's not that. It is truth. It is *Satya*. You understand? and people are blind to that. People want to hear 'O *Sanam*' and it's not 'O *Sanam*' time man, this is the time for *abhi andar dekho* and just get right, because this is the time that time. **This is not the time of bravados. It's the time for many, many deep introspections to understand *iske baad kya hai*. What have you brought your children into?** Those who are going to get married, what is the world that you are going to live in? With masks? **This is where we are. Now, there is no going back.** There is pre-Covid and there is post-Covid. Now we are in the post-Covid and we are in that process between *Kalyug* and *Satyug*. *Satyug* is about to come. So **there is a process, so be in that process.**

Pankaj: How do we then explain our place in the Universe?

Lucky: **We choose. We choose where we want to be.** We choose where we want to be. Today we are in where we are because we wanted to be there. Look at our own situation, is this something that we had chosen. You chose a lovely picture, a lovely picture was presented and what is the *satya* now, what is the *satya* of that? **Till *insaanaapna nahi badlega na dil ka haal, yeh jaane nahi waala hai, magar yahin se jaayega, agar aap meri baat samjho toh. Issi desh mein hai who hone ka. Sirf dil ka haal badalna hai.***

Pankaj: How can we do that?

Lucky: *Jo logo ki soch hai, who badalni hai. Khud badalni hai. Koi aakar sikhaane wala nahi hai kyunki who waqt raha nahi hai abhi sikhaane ka. Sab Bhagwaan lekar hi jaa rahe hain. Matlab jitney bhi buzurg hain, sab jaa hi toh rahe hain. Yeh bimaari kiske liye aayi hai? Buzurgo ke liye aai hai toh kaun dega tumko kuch bhi raasta dekhaane ke liye. Tumne buzurgo ko dhyaan hi nahi diya, jaa rahe hain. Toh jo baatein hum logo ko tay karke rakh leni chahiye, wohi baat* **If you sell it for a small price, this is where we are for selling it for a small price.**

Pankaj: It is and you are so true Lucky bhai because I think it depends on how deep we can think about what's happening around us.

Lucky: But aren't we a deep nation to think? Where does the philosophy arise from? It comes from here man. It comes from Hind. I want to tell you one thing now, maybe if I

say this a lot of people are going to get very, very angry at me, specially Nepali countries and all that stuff but I want to say, whoever has moved away from Hind, has only moved towards their own destruction. Why is say this? From our history, we know that our beloved Prophet said, *'from Hind comes the change.'* So everyone, O man if it comes from Hind, everyone became racist and ran out from Hind. Now, *abhi apne aap ko bachaao. Yeh hai haalat so yeh jo joda ja raha hai*, it's a blessing. Even the people don't know who are doing it, but it is actually a blessing *ki bhaiyya, kayam rahein*. You know at least spiritually *kayam rahein*. **This is very, very important to bring together in people's understanding with love, that's how you can do it. You can't do it any other way. Woh zamaana gaya.**

Pankaj: Lucky bhai, where do you learn from? Like people talk about *Ustads* or Masters or *Gurujis* and so many people. You were talking about *buzurgs* as well. Where do you learn from? Where do you seek realization from? How do you learn?

Lucky: From everybody, even from you. From everybody. Listen to even a child, a child will also have or even listen to how the wind blows or we have to aware to be thankful. If you are thankful, that's the crux of everything. Thankful for being alive. Remember one thing *bhaiji*, Pankaj bhai, ***main ka ghar khaali. Aap jitna bhi main karoge, khaali hojaayenge hum. Aap jitney bhi hum karenge na, bhar jaayenge hum*** and you are on that verge of either your own self destruction or your own change. This is where my country is.

Pankaj: What gives you hope Lucky bhai?

Lucky: Before Covid, I had a dream and *bhaiyya tum marne wale ho, mere dream mein. So main bola, arrey abhi tak toh*, immediately I told my wife, let's go to a pilgrimage and come back. So we went, we did the pilgrimage and we came back. *Yeh nahi hai ki guarantee hai ki ab nahi*, I can die right now in 2 mins. *Aisa kuch nahi hai, matlab koi guarantee nai hai*. It gave me an urgency to try and understand, why did I get this message and then a series of things. I see things in probably a strange way and I don't know why I think the way I think but *hum jaakar aaye*, all totally against, if Covid was going this side, we were coming this side. You know *Bhagwaan bahut bacha bacha kar humko lekar aaya. Humare haath mien toh nahi hai, hum toh marne hi waale hai*, So just go. *Hum jaakar aaye* and then I had this choice, because everybody was deciding, *yaar abhi yeh Covid badh raha hai*, shall we go off to New Zealand? And we can live there because nobody knew *kya hone wala hai iska*. Something told me in my heart, no we will be here. We need to be here and I needed to be here and see all this is happening and that's a crazy thing, I feel that I need to find out some way to help in understanding. *Yeh Covid toh sabko lagega please. Yeh aap tay kar lijiye. Yeh toh kisiko matlab chutne wala nahi hai. Jab (35:15) aati hai na toh Bhagwaan ki taraf se aati hai. Jo usko samjhega na, yeh koi insaan ki matlab haisiyat nahi hai ki ek hi time par saari duniya ko rok kar, saari duniya ruki hui hai. Naa koi mandir jaa sakta hai, naa koi masjid jaa sakta hai, na koi church jaa sakta hai. Log ek dusre ko salaam nahi kar sakte. Toh mereko bataao. Sab ek hi line mein toh khade hain. Kaun bada hai, kaun chota hai iske andar.*

Pankaj: So well said. *Lekin yeh realisation jo hai Lucky bhai*, how can we protect this realisation because other things we as human beings notice that, we keep hopping from one realisation to another, what you are telling me now, how do you protect this? How do

you soak it in, in a way that it lives with you and it dies with you? Is there a way to do that?

Lucky: Of course. Do you have a belief in a Creator? That's the beginning of, knowledge is that only. *Haanji Creator hai, magar hum apni duniya chalaayenge, humara who karenge, who dekhenge. Nahi, nahi, nahi, aisa nahi hota hai. You have to seek your Creator. You will not get this chance again. Yeh jo chance aaya hai humare liye, humare desh ke liye aaya hai, bahut aham chance and a very beautiful chance to be that Nation, to be that. Pakistan ko kyun nahi mil raha yeh? Naam bhi toh Pakistan hi hai na par sab na-paak kaam hote rehte hain wahan.*

Pankaj: What is that image of an ideal nation for you Lucky bhai? *Aapke mann mein kya roop hai?*

Lucky: It won't be on earth. *Yahan toh hone waala nahi hai, duniya mein toh nahi hoga. Iss duniya mein toh nahi hai. Jo aap bolte hain na ki bhaiyaa we have to go to another world for it to be perfect. Over here we are trained only to go and live in that world and you can only become worthy of living in that world when you start recognising your own inability to comprehend each and every thing. Jisne banaya hai uski ko maalum hai na. Ab hum sab jaante hain ki Creator hai, magar sirf baat ki baat hai. Sab Bhagwaan bane baithe hain. Toh abhi Bhagwan hi aagaaye hai to deal with that.*

Pankaj: You are so right about the equality that this has brought. Lucky bhai, on a final note, you have had such a roller-coaster of a ride. From oil rigs to being a musician to being a seeker to being who you are. If you were to hand pick 2, 3, 5 life lessons that people listening to this conversation should take away with them. What will would be some of those life lessons that you feel you can share with us?

Lucky: **Stay humble, just stay humble because the moment you think you are something, someone else comes whose better than you. That's nature. Just stay humble.** That's what my father said. **You have no control over any thing in life.** That's my life lesson.

Pankaj: That's short and sweet and before I sign off, its amazing talking to you Lucky bhai and Godspeed to you.

Lucky: Thank you Baba ji, God bless you.

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