

TYPОLOGY OF POACHERS IN BANGLADESH FROM SOCIAL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

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This paper poses a critical discussion on the typology of Poachers in Bangladesh on the basis of different social contexts and realities. It raises a question about the role of Wildlife Act 2012 on conservation of wildlife and ensuring social justice to the sects of the population who has a symbiotic lifestyle with the nature. Also, the background of poaching in different areas, social, economic condition and political affiliation of poachers of different type is discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is a country with vast biodiversity with 6500 species of Flora and close to 7000 species of Fauna (Ahmed et al, 2008) known till date. Discovery of new species happens every now and then. With such vast biodiversity and diverse landscapes Bangladesh is a fruitful ground for scientific exploration. I am travelling around the country for scientific and research explorations for a long time. Sometimes self-funded and else with organizations like IUCN, Roehampton University, WildTeam international etc for different research purpose. (This vast viodiversity creates..) Through the explorations, I have come across different aspects of natural resource exploitation and other crimes against nature. Poaching is one of these aspects. There is a scarce amount of scientific data about the poachers in Bangladesh. Samia Saif (2015) has done some detailed research about the Poachers in Sundarban. From the explorations, I have come across many

different types of Poachers in Bangladesh. Local population and experts notified me about some of the types. The types of poachers vary in different regions of the country due to the diversity of species, climate, culture and social context.

The Wild Life Conservation and Security Act (2012) of Bangladesh tend to prohibit the extraction of the wildlife and enforce penalties on extraction of them on the basis of their endangered status. Bangladesh is a signatory in the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (1992) and eventually ratified it. Bangladesh keeps her strong vocal in natural conservation worldwide by including the issue as a fundamental principle of state policy in the constitution (2011). On the light of such statutes Bangladesh repeals the older laws on conservation and enacts new laws through Wildlife Act 2012. In such acts, legal definitions of prohibited wild species for extraction, types of restricted forest areas, punishment of killing or extraction of different species are noted. A perpetrator of such prohibitions is legally punishable. But in many cases social contexts of the perpetrators are different than the broader aspect, for example, in the cases of indigenous people, local minority sects etc. Though they practice a symbiotic extraction process that is harmonious with nature, they fell under the laws. On the other hand, with different loopholes in the laws, people with power commits crimes against environment, even direct poaching for recreation, but slip the hand of justice.

CONSTITUTION, CONVENTIONS ACTS AND PLANS

Article 18A of Bangladesh Constitution (2011) lists the “endeavor” to protect the wildlife for “future generations of citizens” as a fundamental principle to the state policy of Peoples Republic of Bangladesh. Also, on article 23A, the protection of unique culture and lifestyle of ethnic groups, minorities and sects is listed as a fundamental principle (2011). Article 18A obligates the government of Bangladesh to act on conservation of wildlife.

Bangladesh is a signatory in international conventions like Convention on Biological Diversity 1992 and its Cartagena Protocol, and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species in Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Bangladesh is a prompt actor in such conventions, for instance, joined CITES in 1981 and ratified it in 1982 (Cites.org, 2015).

The Convention on Biological Diversity was adopted in 1992, 22nd May in Nairobi (Cbd.int, 2015). Bangladesh joined and ratified the Convention and its Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (Cbd.int, 2015). The convention mandates the contracting parties of this convention to develop national strategies, plans or programs for the conservation of the biological diversity according to respective capability of each contracting states in article 6A (Handbook, 2005). In article 8 of the convention, the duties “as possible and as appropriate” for the contracting parties for In-situ conservation is listed, where measures like restricted areas, protected areas and zones etc are encouraged (pg-8). In section “j” of article 8; as

mentioned before in the preamble section of the convention; the importance of indigenous knowledge and lifestyle in conservation and the mandate to accommodate such knowledge and lifestyle in conservation endeavor in legal way is stated.

In other articles, provisions and sections of both the Convention itself and the Cartagena Protocol (Secretariat, 2000), provisions and regulations on transport and exchange on genetic samples, species, trophies etc of flora and fauna, cooperation among the states in conservation, research, monitoring, dispute settlement between parties etc are discussed.

CITES or Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species in Wild Fauna and Flora focuses on the trade of different endangered species of world flora and fauna. This convention lists around 35497 species and around 71 sub species of endangered flora and fauna under three appendices of different importance (Cites.org, 2015). The measures to be taken by the signatory parties about the trades, listing and academic or conservation exchanges of the endangered species are guided in this convention. Strict regulatory management is proposed in the commercial exchange of the endangered species.

The Wildlife Protection Act 2012 of Bangladesh maintains the guidance to form elaborate and strict conservation act. While the conservations do not pose elaborate definition of “poachers” or “perpetrators of conservation”, this act chalks these details out from Bangladesh perspective. The Wildlife act (2012) defines “hunting” as:

- a) Killing, capturing, poisoning of any wild animal or any attempt to do so; or b) Driving any wildlife for the purpose of such actions
- c) Injuring or damaging and taking any part of the body of a wild animal or collecting or destroying of nests or eggs of wild birds or reptiles.

This definition encompasses the activities of poaching broadly and implies that the perpetrators who fall under these definite actions are poachers.

Yet it differs with the conventions in a significant point. The Convention on Biological Diversity emphasized on the involvement and practice of indigenous knowledge and lifestyle in conservation and thus the preservation of such knowledge and lifestyle also. Though in section 32 of chapter 3 of this act, the indigenous people are granted indemnity for their traditional

trophies etc derived from wildlife (declared as collected prior to the enactment of this law), and in section 21 it is said to involve the indigenous people and their knowledge in co-management system; the act affect the indigenous people, minority sects of the population and their traditional lifestyle which is symbiotic with nature and conservation.

Also, provisions of licenses, grant of permit for different purposes, ecotourism, provision for registered trade etc create opportunity loopholes in the law for different types of poaching.

Most significantly, such permits are easily available for the people from higher strata of the society. With their influence, they have the chance to skip the provisions of this law on exploiting the limits of the permits (article 25).

On the other hand, different types of marginal and poverty ridden people often dwell near the sanctuaries and protected areas. The sanctuaries are often situated in the indigenous territory also. With just the provisions of this law, without the symbiotic management of nature and human activities, both the nature and wildlife are threatened and the dwellers face injustice.

CONCEPT MAPPING FOR THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF POACHERS

In order for the classification of poachers in Bangladesh from social context, I used three basic questions about the population who are involved in such extraction of natural resources. These questions are:

1. What is the poachers' economic condition?

This question encompasses the economic condition of the people who are involved in direct hunting and extraction as well as the people who influence the direct act. I examined if the grass root poachers are poor and village dwellers, if they do poaching to earn their bread and butter. I also observed the poachers who are economically well off and engage or influence direct poaching for recreation and profit. The economic influence on the poachers is also examined, for instance the influence and involvement of the tourists in direct poaching is examined.

2. How is the poachers' social situation?

This question is asked to measure the social position that poachers hold, if they have the ability to avoid the punishment or not and if they acquire the permits required to regulated extraction of resources. Also, the ethnicity distribution among the poachers is also covered by this question. This question also involves the aspects of social background from which the poachers come from. The community they belong to- mainstream population, minority sects or indigenous citizens- is an important question to ask, because different communities have different point of view on natural resource extraction. While the mainstream population opts for profit maximization and economic expansion and puts life standard on the level of consumption, the minority sects like "Bede" or "Snake Charmers" depends on it as a necessity for survival. Indigenous sects take themselves as "children of nature", vastly pagan and depend on symbiotic coexistence with nature. They are going through different changes due to modernization and communication with the mainstream population. The aspects of such change are also covered under this question.

3. Do poachers have political affiliation?

Political affiliation is plays an important role in many crimes. So is the case with poaching. This question is about the influence of political affiliation of the poachers. The pressure from local political leadership drives poor people to poaching. For instance in 2015, six suspected tiger poachers were shot dead (The Daily Star, 2015) in Sundarban. The local people told me that it

was done by the administration to hide some influential names of local politics that were involved in poaching. Also political influence poses some assurances to the affiliated poachers of protection from punishment.

But the poachers with no affiliation with politics and extractors from indigenous population and other minority sects generally do not enjoy the backup of political affiliation. So, they are commonly convicted.

I stratified the poachers on the basis of how many of these three criteria work positively for each of the type. There are some other sub-types under the major types of poachers I found throughout the country.

TYPOLOGY BASED ON THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

The different types of poachers on the basis of social-economic context, methods, motifs etc are entwined and it is a difficult task to separate and generalize a type. Yet there are patterns in different poaching practices and poachers. Using the questions on the social context of the poachers the typology of them spreads as four major types with nine sub types and branches. They are as follows:

1. Mainstream “Plain land” Poachers: The mainstream population of Bangladesh or ethnically “Bengalis” is also called as the “people from plain land”. As the majority of the citizens of Bangladesh they contain the largest type of poachers from socio-economic background. The plain land people are distributed all over the country. As Bangladesh contains a high amount of cultivable fertile land, (around 52% of the area), agriculture is the largest economy. To define the mainstream “plain land” poachers, I will exclude the urban population as they consist in a different type of poaching. The root level direct poaching is mostly conducted by the rural people and in most of the cases, poaching is not the only means of living for these poachers. Economic profits, lure of unconventional bounty, influence of gaining profit, pressure from influential people and visitors, whims etc work behind the motivation of these poachers. Also they come to poaching from all the major religions and philosophies (Ghosh, 2015). Their targets and methods differ according to their religion sometimes. For instance, Muslim poachers usually do not kill “wild boar” or “tortoises” as eating them is prohibited in Islam. The plain land indigenous people and minority sects are also mostly excluded from this type as they consist in another type. Yet it is entwined, the identity and background of these poachers as sometimes poachers from other type act from same motif.

Also, many mainstream people or “plain land” people dwell in the hilly areas of the country among the indigenous people. The mainstream poachers are found in all the terrains of Bangladesh.

These poachers range in 6 subtypes.

Professional Poachers: Professional poachers take poaching as their income source. It is not that

they solely depend on poaching for living or they do not know to do else, rather, they chose to earn from poaching because it is more profitable than the regular occupations in different circumstances. Some of them keep another source of income besides poaching, and then poaching becomes

secondary source for them. On the basis of such practice, they are divided into two branches.

Primary professional poachers: Those for whom poaching is the primary source of income, they are included in this category. They usually dwell in the nearby villages of the jungles where they take on poaching operations. They are members of village community so it is easy for them to disguise and hide among them. As poaching is their profession, they know about the foreign and national level buyers of their games. For example, in the Sundarban region, they often use the Pashur and other river channels where vessels from different countries come to supply these games to the vessels. It is not much that they always profit from such bargains. Their earnings depend on the circumstances and their ability to bargain.

The distribution of these poachers is different throughout the country. Sundarban is home to many exotic wildlife; both flora and fauna; and a paramount attraction to the customers. It is situated by the sea and it holds the coastline. Sundarban also shares border with India and it is divided between Bangladesh and India. So it is much easier to trade wild specimen from Sundarban.

On the other hand, the next most densely diverse flora and fauna are found in the Sylhet- Chittagong belt. It also shares border with India. But the border there is a sensitive one as adjacent to it, lays the Seven Sisters-distant and turmoil provinces of India. So the border guarding is heavy and coerce there. Moreover, as the Sundarban is situated near to a major port and city of India; from the West Bengal province; the trades are easier there. But the Sylhet Chittagong belt does not have such a marketing hub nearby. The local sea and border land docks in this belt is a way to smuggle some of the wild specimen in and out. The advantage in transportation in Chittagong creates another subtype of poaching.

In the middle and northwestern part of Bangladesh, the wildlife situation is very poor to create any poaching opportunities for the professional poachers. The madhupur- bhawal forest is home to some wild life that comes under the threat of poaching.

The coastal belt of the country sees the wildlife and marine diversity in the coastal plantations in these areas. Deer, tortoise, crabs etc are the subject of poaching here. Including professional poaching, other different types are present here. As there is no land predator in the island bases for Deer, such as in “Nijhum Dwip”, a common technique of neutralization for the poachers and people to hunt there is that, with the immense rate of growing, the Deer population has to be controlled, otherwise they will be threatened.

The migratory birds are also victims of professional poaching. Before the enforcement of environmental and conservation laws and acts, the migratory birds were caught in numbers and openly sold even in the capital. With the gradual increase in the operations of Wildlife Crime Control Unit and other conservation bodies along with the increase in consciousness among the people, the threat to the migratory birds is decreasing. Yet, poaching of such birds is not completely checked.

Samia Saif (2015) stated about the trappers in Sundarban in her category of poachers in Sundarban. Trappers are found in different areas of Bangladesh. Their method of poisoning (Bish Faad), Chitka or contracting snare, Haata Faad or hanging snare is commonly used also. There are other methods to catch different animals like Bears, snakes etc. Saif categorized the trappers differently from the professional poachers mostly on the basis of tiger hunting. Though it is commonly seen among any of the hunters, trapping is a special technique for professional poachers. With traps, they do not have to be present while catching a game, do not have to carry gun and avoid many obstacles.

Secondary professional poachers: Secondary professional poachers are the people who take poaching as the secondary source of income. Primarily they have both legal and illegal means to earn. Common legal first profession for them are tourist guide, fishermen etc while the illegal means are wood thievery from the forest, pirates, drug dealing etc. They are not even occasional poachers. Their prey is usually bovine, deer and other edible sets of wildlife.

Secondary poachers with legal first profession are available all around the country. Local farmers, labor, fishermen, village heads are often involved in deforestation, animal hunting etc for economic profit. Acquisition against officers of forest department of the republic is also common throughout the country of patronizing poachers and in deforestation. In June 2012, the then chief of wildlife section of the forest department, Tapan Kumar Dey was alleged by an arrested tiger cub trafficker (The Daily Star, 2012) to place the order for the cubs. The arrested person also indicated about other order placements on behalf of Mr. Dey demanding Crocodiles, Python, Gharials etc before. Mr. Dey handled the purchase of animals for the “Bangabandhu Safari Park” in Gazipur.

Secondary poachers with illegal first profession consist of pirates in Sundarban, robbers and other miscreants hiding in different forests of the country etc. Pirates of the Sundarban usually hunt Tigers for safety as they hide in the jungle to avoid law enforcers (Saif, 2015). It is true for other types of robbers who dwell in the other forests. For the pirates of the Sundarban, poaching brings extra income also. They are well connected with the buyers. Even the professional poachers keep in touch with them to connect with buyers.

For such poachers dwelling in other forests of the country, usually the local market is the place to sell. How much connection do they have with the foreign buyers is still unknown.

No academic research is conducted to identify the buyers of these professional poachers. So this area is still ambiguous. The direct poachers are encountered, they make the newspaper heading

sometimes, but their buyers lurk in shadow. These buyers do not take liability of the professional poachers. The shootout of October 2015 in Sundarban reported by newspapers (Daily Star) indicates so. Also from such an incident, it can be sensed that the buyers and middlemen of such trades are powerful people, so indicated the local people. So they stay out

of focus and the poachers; being from underprivileged strata of the society are punished; sometimes in such severe manner. The government is planning to take more rigorous action against 475 “listed” professional poachers in Sundarban according to the news reports (the independent, 2015). But the people of influence in the background are still not touched.

Seasonal Poachers: Seasonal poachers hunt animals in a season, not throughout the year. Winter

is a fertile season for poaching as the odds like rain, fear of snake, obstacles in movement due to flooding of low lands etc lower in winter. In winter come the migratory birds and other environmental attributes give advantage to the poachers. Winter is also the largest tourist season. There are other tourist seasons as the pre settled vacations. In such seasons poaching activities increase at a high rate. The independent reports (2015) about such a season during Eid where they claim about 100 groups of poachers enter Sundarban for deer and other hunting. Different types of poachers enter in different jungles in seasons, keeping a track of all of them is a difficult job even for the forest department. The seasonal poachers also join them.

These poachers come from both nearby villages and different areas. Their primary profession varies. Boatman, tour guides are often requested by the tourists to entertain them with deer meat. In 2012, I went to a tour in Sundarban with the Department of University of Dhaka I studied my Honors in. There few of my classmates started collecting money from other to arrange deer meat for dinner. If they were able to collect the money then, they would have given it to the people from the tour operators who were accompanying us to procure the meat.

Seasonal poaching is pursued by many as a seasonal opportunity of high profiting business.

Such poachers are hard to detect or track, so usually they escape from the law enforcement. But they usually do not hold the capability to escape conviction if caught. Larger tour operators with strong connection and hold can manage to manage such poaching incidents more silently and escaping the law.

Occasional poachers: Occasional poachers just use their opportunity of encounter with wild

animals, occasional need or order for animals to hunt animals. Occasional poachers often kill animal just out of curiosity. In Sylhet, Gazipur, Comilla, Lakshmipur and other parts of the country I talked with people who have done occasional poaching. Many of them told me they sometimes killed different birds unknown to them and later found out that the bird is not edible or the meat is not tasty. Also in areas nearby forests, people kill animals to treat the guests in with some delicacy of deer or bird meat.

Another occasional poaching occurs when workers who work inside of the forests come across wild animals sometimes. Not on all occasion, but in 10-15 in a 100, they try to hunt or capture the wild animals.

Occasional poachers do poaching for diverse motif. Sudden need of safety in the jungle, curiosity, sudden rush of opportunity, courting personal and local guests with honor, religious occasion etc work behind their motif of poaching. Most of the cases; when they capture a specimen or trophy of a wild animal; they do not even know where to sell it.

Religious occasion is an important cause of occasional poaching. For example, Hindus eat Indian Porcupine (*Hystrix Indica*) during the worship office of the goddess Kali. Also tortoise is eaten by them in different occasion.

Due to the restriction about keeping specimen, trophies etc in Wildlife Act 2012, many occasional poachers are caught. But the generalized punishment treats them as the same with other poachers. Though such strong approach of the act decreased the rate of occasional poaching, punitive system fails to address the root of the practice. Now, those who occasionally kill or capture wildlife try to avoid punishment and law by hiding evidence, but the killing and capturing continues, though at a decreased rate. Consciousness building and educating people about conservation would work better in preventing the occasional poachers. Already with the growing national and international level concern about conservation and vast activities throughout the country decreased the tendency of occasional poaching in general people.

Whims Poaching: In 1980's a whims spread about Toad export in Bangladesh that one can earn

huge money by selling Toads they are exported to countries like Singapore, Thailand etc. Mass capture of Toads in that decade and after endangered the existence of Toads in Bangladesh. Later, another whims spread out about the Tokay Gecko that buyers are paying over a 1000000 in Bangladeshi currency for each of them. I saw a Gecko captured in the Academy of Fine Arts in the capital. On the spot people raised its probable price higher than three hundred thousand in discussion. But there was no one who was paying the money or knows about a buyer.

Common people get involved in mass poaching during such whims for easy bounty of profit. But they do not have any idea about the credibility of the whims, information about the price or buyers. So most of the cases the animals are killed or captured only.

There is no academic work on such whims poaching. But often the events of such poaching are found. I met a Bengali guide in Bandarban, Kabir, who told me that he caught a Gecko and put it in care of an indigenous villager for growing it. After three years he will collect the Gecko. In answer to my question about the buyer and payment, he told me that he captured the Gecko after he received the down payment. The final payment, according to him is going to be three hundred thousand of Bangladeshi currency. He did not reveal the identity of the buyer, middleman or the villager. The purpose of Gecko is unknown to him.

Suman, a youth from Koroitola village of Noakhali mentioned of three whims in that village while I was interviewing him. Firstly, he talked about the whims about "pillars" where people went crazy to find out an

unknown metal object in the village planted by the British in the colonial rule. They heard that such “pillars” are worth millions. But they do not have any factual data about neither the existence nor whereabouts of the pillars nor their price.

The whim about the “pillars” is similar by unknown origin, lure of bounty and fictional stories about it with the poaching whims. Suman also mentioned about two recent whims of Toad poaching and Gecko poaching. He said most of the village teenagers and children left now rock unturned to find Toads for selling. But no one of them sold a piece as they did not know any buyer.

Suman told that in last year a party of seekers came to the village from the town to search for Geckos. He does not know from which city the party came from or any detailed identity of the party. But he told me that an elder of the village called “Karim” found inspired the villagers to find Geckos as he was working as a liaison for the party. They were promised to be paid with ten million in Bangladeshi currency if they can find a Gecko of 350 grams. Two young men from the village found a Gecko but the Gecko weighed only 250 grams and they did not get the bounty. They were offered 30000 taka by another party for that Gecko.

I interviewed Karim later on. He told me about another party from the city whom he fetched two Large Indian Civets from the village for 7500 taka. He did not disclose the identity of the parties to me. But his approach expressed he knew about their identities.

The trace of the origin of these whims, the buyers, prices, middleman etc about such poaching needs revealing. Academic work on such poaching is necessary for conservation and tracing such poaching as it is a devastating practice for the wildlife.

Trade Extractors:

Different type of wildlife trade in both the internal and external markets in Bangladesh is seen. Traditional medicine, delicacy food in foreign countries, etc are the prominent trades that are going on from long past here. The extraction of wildlife for these trades is high and unmeasured. Specimens are sold openly even in the capital for virility, cure etc.

For example, in Nilkhel in the capital lizards are sold as medicine for virility. It is called “shanda” in the local language. When talked about it with the seller, he said he imported this lizard from India. There were small scorpions and leeches too.

Trade extractors capture both listed and non-listed species of wild animals. As the capture is for trade purpose and they handle the business, over extraction and wastage are common. I found few small fishing corporations who are directly involved in Shark poaching. They use small anchors to catch Sharks. Even gigantic Bull Sharks are captured by these corporations.

They export Sharks illegally to Myanmar as Shark trade and capture is banned in there. In the list of protected wild species in Wildlife act 2012 of Bangladesh, Bull Shark is not listed (Alam,

2013). Yet the mass of extraction by these corporations is over thousands of tons every year. The

set of shark fins and tail, shark teeth, skin, meat all parts of sharks are exported to foreign buyers as there is very small demand in local market for sharks.

There is not monitoring or measurement from government at all on such trade extractions. If the extraction so continues, many shark species should become critically endangered soon.

Moreover, there are docks in the Cox's Bazaar and Teknaf region; the same region of the shark trading corporations; which are not listed by government. In these docks, enormous amount of fishes and marine species are captured and processed. Wastage of marine species is high in these docks too. Here, both protected, non-protected by law marine species are found in numbers.

Interviewing the monitoring officer of the docks in the region in 2014, I learned that monitoring is only done in the government dock. The other non-listed docks are out of monitoring. The officer does not know about the shark trade. Government procedure lists the marine species as "fishes" and there is only four categories of fishes according to it. Hilsha, Rup Chanda, Chanda and Miscellaneous are the four categories and except for first three fish species, the other entire marine specimens are listed under "Miscellaneous".

These trade extractors in Cox's Bazar are economically solvent, socially powerful and often politically affiliated people. They have their own organization called "Hangor Malik Kollyan Samiti" (Shark Traders Association). They have their own boats and workforce to capture shark.

In the dock all sorts of fishermen dump their captures for processing and sell. It is hard to keep the track of them.

A big network of business is expanded behind the Trade Extractors. A lot of them are economically solvent and socio-politically powerful. The traders of local medicines are from

lower strata of the society. Mere prohibition is not enough to control such extraction. Awareness building, alternative opportunity building for the traders and strict monitoring is needed simultaneously. If the law is bent by the powerful traders, then there will be a monopoly for them as the poorer fishermen would not be able to avoid the law. But the long these trades will keep the more species will be endangered.

Community Poachers: Different villages, village communities act in killing and capturing of

wildlife for different motifs. Sometimes for safety as per in border regions of Sylhet, Sherpur etc where wild elephant, bear, leopards attack. Also it was a common scenario in Sundarban before Wild Team started awareness program and village tiger response team operation there. Many tigers were killed by the mob in Sundarbans. Saif (2015) reports that villagers in Sundarban beat tigers to death sometime in order to collect tiger parts for economic and medicinal purpose also. But in other regions where the villagers are not familiar with such wildlife trade, animal killing for such

purpose by the mob is rare. In those regions, mob beats animals to death usually for safety and from anger if the animal acts in a harm's way.

Communities and individuals from villages act in killing animals both for pest killing and killing without direct reason. There was a Face Book post in 2015 where a person posted his kill, a monitor that was eating fish from his farm. I visited Koroitola village in Lakshmipur on 1st of January 2016, just four days prior to my visit, two Large Indian Civets (*Viverra Zibethi*) were killed in that village by poisoning because they were eating fowls from households.

Yusuf, a village elder told me that in the monsoon, a shopkeeper killed a non-venomous water snake which was just resting behind his shop. On the next day its pair was also killed by the same shopkeeper at the same place, while it was mating with the dead one according to Yusuf.

To answer my question, he said the shopkeeper knew the snakes were non venomous but he killed them anyway. It is not that he was afraid of them Yusuf told me that snakes are usually killed because they eat fish from the ponds. I observed a contempt approach towards snakes among the village people due to some mixed reason. In many religions snake is coined as a "negative character". Also a mental repellency occurs to snakes in them because it creeps. Often it is observed that snakes are killed from such mixed conscience.

Another village elder is "Karim" whom I mentioned in the whims poaching section. He is mostly a labor. He does different things to earn, wood chopping mostly. Other villagers told me that he knows about the wildlife of the village as he roams day and night in the village Holts. His approach expressed that he is familiar with animal trading. He mentioned his strong bargaining with the party which came to buy the Large Indian Civets.

In the Wild Life act 2012, there is provision to convict organizations for poaching and harm towards wildlife, but such communities are not mentioned or there is no provision for convicting. This is positive because detection of leaders of the community in such actions is difficult as most of the people even children participate in collecting body parts and beating of the animal. Also awareness and precaution rather than punishment is effective in this context. Success of Wild Team Bangladesh in decreasing tiger killing in Sundarban is a proof of it.

There is another trend in the village communities dwelling around the forests. They intentionally set fire in the forest to clear out land and turn the forest lands into crop fields or households. Due to such forest fire a lot of species from both flora and fauna are damaged. It is really hard to find out the person who started the fire, even if the fire is intentional or unintentional. The forest act

hold provisions to treat such actions but the difficulty to trace the perpetrator stands as a huge obstacle. For instance, Sundarban caught such a fire in 2010 (bdnews24.com, 2010).

Killing and capturing different animals is often a pastime for the villagers. It is a common approach of village people in Bangladesh that wild animals

are usually pests. Thus they kill such animals without thinking. Village youth and children often chase, torment different animals for recreation. Many village dwellers take killing animals as a pride and advertise their kill.

But such situation is changing slowly with the advent of modern technologies, migration to cities and abroad by the villagers and creation of newer scopes for recreation for them. Formal education does little about awareness building of village people about wildlife. But education and awareness building for them will work more effectively than the law for conservation.

2. Recreational Poachers: Many hunters, shooters are present in Bangladesh who often forms groups to go on hunting for fun. From the British period, hunting is considered as a royal pass time. Such groups of hunter consists officials of armed forces, multinational companies, government officials etc. For the presence of high profile individuals, these groups are overlooked by the law enforcers and skip the hand of law. They usually operate in winter and hunt migratory birds. Yet I came to know about a groups operation where they killed around 700 migratory birds and 7 deer in a southern island at the Bay of Bengal. They bribed some higher officials with their hunt to avoid legal consequences. One of the members of that group told me that there are zone based groups in different regions of Bangladesh. They operated in their designated zone, sometimes one or two hunters from one zone is invited to hunt in other zone. He told me, the group in Chittagong hill tracts region dream of killing a Black Panther some day.

Tanneries receive skins of tiger, leopard, and snakes for tanning from high post individuals who keep such trophies of their game. They hunt for recreation and with their socio economic position, they can easily acquire permit under the Wildlife Act 2012. Though there is provision in the act of punishment for exploiting the permit, such people of power can easily skip the hand of law much efficiently than the other types of poachers. Of all the poachers, they are mentioned the least. As such gaming is seen as a royal gesture and right of the rich.

Armed forces officers in the hill tracts often acquire wild animals in their possession. There are mini zoos inside of the cantonments sometimes. Tough the trends changed from the past, I learned about a bear named “bullet” of the Chittagong Zoo. He was donated to the zoo by an army official. The official found him before naming him “bullet” from a Major as a gift. The major caught the bear from the jungles of Ruma, Bandarban. It is an incident of the 1980’s. Trends changed, yet with power even endangered species can be acquired by the higher society individuals. They can also import such species using loopholes in CITES provisions and regulations.

3. Minority Poachers: There are many minority and different ethnic groups in Bangladesh.

Some of them are indigenous people and others are minority sects by religion, culture or profession. These marginalized minority citizens of the

country are mostly dependent on the nature of the land from long past. Naturally, they built a symbiotic lifestyle with the nature with minimal extraction of the needed resources.

Yet, under the definition of “hunting” in the Wildlife act 2012, they indiscriminately fall under the punitive provisions for the “poachers”. Though some opportunity is given to them to keep their traditional trophies derived from wild specimen from the past and a provision on community management of wildlife is kept, following the Wildlife act strictly leaves little chance of practicing their traditional symbiotic lifestyle with nature and using their knowledge about conservation. Ironically; as stated before; Article 23A of the Constitution lists protection of their traditional lifestyle and culture as a fundamental principle of the republic.

It is an injustice to them to coin them as “poachers” indiscriminately. I am using the term to point the legal definition.

The minority poachers are of two sub types:

Indigenous Poachers: There is doubt about the population, number of groups of indigenous people in Bangladesh. Different sources provide with different statistics (Ebbd.info, 2015). From

35 to 45 smaller groups, from 1.3 percent to 2 percent of the total population etc statistics are provided by the government and other organizations (Drong & Moy Dhama, 2015).

The indigenous people of Bangladesh are spread over all the regions in the country. They live in small communities in these regions. They most densely live in the Hill Tracts region. Among other areas, they live in Chittagong, Sylhet, Rajshashi, Khulna, Barishal and Tangail areas of the particularly.

In general they are dependent on the nature for their livelihood from ancient time. Situation is changing in the modern days. Because of their dependency, they tend to extract minimal from the nature. In the past, they used to store very minimal due to the lack of storage facilities. Also the lack of communication prevented them from trade of natural resources. Such obstacles and dependency on nature influenced them to improvise symbiotic lifestyle and tradition with the nature.

For example, different tribes of an indigenous group often have different totem; derived from fruits, birds or animals; eating or harming such symbolic lives is a sin for them (Sattar, 2012). In this way the extraction of species from the wild is kept to minimal though most of the tribes are omnivorous. Also, they are aware if they exhaust all these natural resources, there is be none left for the future.

Modernization brought different changes in their lives. Firstly, due to communication and modern education, they are becoming less dependent on the nature through farming, cultivation etc. In the long year of mingling with the indigenous people in different areas of Bangladesh, I learned that now they hunt for food scatteredly as they have cattle and fowls in their homes. Some domestication of wildlife like different wild bovines are already done to the extent because some of them are no longer found in

the wild in Bangladesh. I have seen specimen of hunted animals in different villages of indigenous people in Bandarban. In the plain land indigenous people, the trend of hunting and keeping trophies is at the most decline. Santals of Rajshahi and Khagrachori has some of hunting practice.

The hunting for food I observed in the “Boolum Village” in Bandarban. It is a village of the Murung people. One morning they caught a pair of Rhesus Monkeys in 2014. Monkey meat is a favorite food of the Murung. I talked with them about the act and punishment but they had no idea of the act.

The decrease of wild species due to the hunting of the indigenous people is not measured. With almost one hundredth of population dwelling in the region, their hunting mustn’t have done much damage.

What is more concerning is that the pressure and influence of the urban people and modernization. Due to the development of communication and transport, a numerous number of tourists visit the hill tracts every year they often caprice for exotic delicacy as the meat of python, deer, monitor or pangolin. They offer handsome amount of money and other expensive stuff to the indigenous people in exchange of such delicacies. In one occasion, I saw a tourist group to send an indigenous man to hunt a barking deer for dinner. The man hunted down one with his gun.

For such influences and modern idea of consumerism, the indigenous people try to expand such profitable business. For example, there are some restaurants in the hill tracts which commercially sell meats of deer, pangolin, python and monitor. Tourists rush there to eat such delicacies.

While treated by the law, the indigenous people are questioned for poaching. The tourists and the influencers are usually spared. As a result, in spite of punishing some of the indigenous people, the hunt does not stop.

Minority Sects: There are many of the minority sects in Bangladesh who depend on the nature.

Some depend on nature because of the local culture, some for religious belief and some for professional cause. “Bede” or the snake charmers, “Bawali” or the leaf gatherer, “Mouali” or the honey gatherer etc are some of these sects. They are expert in many skills needed for conservation. For instance, the snake charmers know snake handling and capturing and are often called by the people to remove poisonous snakes from their houses. The leaf and honey gatherers know about the jungles way.

But there is no definitive provision for such minority sects in the Wildlife act. Rather the generalized provisions endanger their livelihood especially for the snake charmers as they depend on snake catching and handling.

4. Political Poachers:

Politically influenced poaching is a critical threat in the sector of Conservation in Bangladesh. The motif of political poaching is usually the possession of lands and it is usually done towards the flora of different areas. The fauna is hit by habitat loss, forest fires, and occasional encounter killings by the wood choppers etc due to this practice. Tops of

local political power such as Chairman of different unions, local heads of different political parties etc act as the influence or instigator while marginal poor people act directly in such poaching.

The intentional forest fires in Sundarban mentioned in the community poaching section is often politically influenced. By starting forest fires, they start the deforestation process. As the monitoring of the burnt area afterwards is weak from the government, they keep claiming the land gradually and at last the land of the jungle becomes part of their estate.

There was a long plantation belt along the coastline of Noakhali in the 1990's. The social plantation project of the government established this belt as a shield from cyclones. The flora and fauna flourished in this coastline plantation belt. Nurul Amin Bhuyian was a forest guard here. He described how the forest was destroyed by political influence. He said political leaders keep from direct action themselves and deploy stranded and desperate people. These people are poor and marginal. They chop down trees, start forest fires and instigate people to work for deforestation. Often women are deployed to chop down trees. The forest guards do not detain

women usually, so it becomes hard for them to stop them. These perpetrators become violent when challenged. Forest guards face violence from them

Such process is destroying forest all over Bangladesh. Nurul Amin emphasized on the Forest of Nijhum Island, that the scenic beauty of nature is declining and it is under a threat for such activities.

The political leaders leave no trace of them in poaching. The personnel they use as help are prosecuted instead as they are involved in direct poaching. Thus this process continues. Nurul Amin also emphasized that the political leaders can easily stop such activities as they start them. So, while enforcement is failing in this matter, motivating political leaders in conservation can work effectively.

THE NECESSARY STEPS AND INJUSTICE: CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

Conservation is easy said than done. Especially in the context of Bangladesh, it is harder to protect the wildlife. The society of Bangladesh has endured colonial exploitation, where the rulers were concerned of maximum profit from natural resources. The native society in the colonial period and later had human conditions to think about, poverty, development, market expansion etc. It pursued capitalism to attend to the human needs of fundamental and human rights, which were vastly denied in the colonial period. So, society found less time to attend to the environment and biodiversity. Now, in the verge of catastrophes due to climate change, voices are rising for conservation. Government is taking action by passing different laws to protect environment and biodiversity. But where the society's concern is centered on human development and it is still facing severe impediments in that sector, mere laws and punishment could not do any better. People of

Bangladesh now hardly realize the importance of biodiversity and the grim of ecological balance destruction. Especially among the urban people educated in capitalist practices and philosophies, the tendency for utmost exploitation of natural resources in every way possible is deeply rooted. On the other hand, rural marginal people, less educated in modern capitalist education, have the sense of harmony with nature due to the traditional nature oriented practices.

Punitive laws enacted discriminately will achieve very less if such a difference and drift from native tradition persevere. Especially when different national and international powerful syndicates are trading with wildlife secretly, only the powerless will face the punishment and the core dealers will be spared. The silent national, international and political syndicates are the “ghost buyers” of wildlife like Gecko, Civet, Tiger parts etc. Government overlooks them as either scratch other’s back. As seen in the discussion, poaching by the local rural people are unorganized, they usually do not know where to sell the wildlife. On the other hand, the “ghost buyers” are so organized that they are always active yet unseen.

In such a situation, the most effective way for conservation is through the participation of the people. Rather drifting away from the tradition, practicing the nature oriented, simple lifestyle is needed now. Consciousness building, research on traditional environment friendly lifestyle and technology, engaging the people in the grass root level will work much more effectively for conservation. The indigenous knowledge, culture and practice of all the ethnic people of the country provide salient guidance towards natural conservation.

A paramount example of how effectively the participation of local people and practice of traditional knowledge can work on conservation is set by Mr. Mollah Rejaul Karim; former Divisional Forest Officer of Rangpur and Rajshahi division. With very less amount of funding and logistic support from his department, he started a conservation revolution in Bangladesh. In every district of the divisions he once served, he built voluntary groups of rural people who actively participate in conservation. He preached his initiatives through social media Facebook and by that more urban youth is joining in conservation. In his telephone interview with me taken on 4th of January 2016, he described the vast number of wildlife he rescued and number of air guns and other weapons of poaching he ceased with the help of the local community.

Such is the effectiveness of popular concern. Also, only playing by law will hamper the lifestyle of different indigenous, ethnic and marginal groups of the country, that are more nature friendly than the mainstream capitalism inclined one. If only the laws are played, the indigenous knowledge and practice of symbiotic lifestyle with the nature will be omitted. Research, realization and practice of such lifestyle is more urgently needed for sustainability.

The root of the people of people of Bangladesh lies among the native and indigenous tradition and culture. This root is the guidance for sustainable

development through conservation as it is the symbiosis between the people and the nature of this land.

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