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Nasim Hasan [00:00:09] Well, I think it's quite a long story. I was, the place I was born and raised was just a riverside place, you know? Like the river, which is called Bangshi River, it's one of the very important rivers around Dhaka City, but most important in Bangladesh, as well. And my house, and I was born and raised in a house that was right on the river of Bangshi. And, you know, in Bangladesh, fishing is almost a common pastime activity. All over Bangladesh. And the animals that live wherever you go in Bangladesh, when it's season of fishing, you see people of different ages, different walks of life there, enjoying fishing in the rivers and canals [unintelligible]. So if, as long as I can remember, about myself. That from my very young, and I was, I was born and raised in a very big extended family. My grandmother, my uncles, two or three of my uncles, my father, my family, their families, lots of cousins. You know, it's a very big family that was raised and I was born. And I had my seniors in my family, and they were fishing. They used to go for fish in the river, in the pond, in just the local waterways. Spontaneously, came into a habit to go fish. And after that, when I was getting older, I, I was, uh, you know, in my place, in my village where I was raised, many people, many anglers at that time, I'm talking about, like '80s, mid-'80s, many people, many great anglers from Dhaka City used to go to that river for fishing. And that river was full of life, at that time. It was tremendous. I'll take you over there, it's really wonderful. And we used to stand behind them. You know, those tackles, those reels, those were something that we couldn't possess at that time. Uh, so. They were like something that we would dream about, that one day we would have, just, like that. And we would sit for fishing with this kinds of stuff. And that's how, in fact, everything began, and in my family, I had, my a few of my cousins, they used to go for fishing, fishing, I mean angling. And in my family, being riverside, we had cast netting, you know, in almost every riverside house, wherever you go in Bangladesh, you find some very common things; a cast net, do you know cast net?

James Thull [00:03:56] Cast net, yes.

Nasim Hasan [00:03:58] Yeah, cast nets and some tackles, hooks. And maybe, could be made of bamboo, or nylon or simple nylon lengths. You will find it almost everywhere in Bangladesh. And we had cast net in our home, and my uncles, my cousins, my elder ones, used to go for fishing with cast nets. I couldn't cast at that time, but when I grew up, I learned it spontaneously. And in game fishing, I had a neighbor and he's a distant, distant cousin to me, and when I was young, I used to see him catching big, giant size of fish. He was catching with rods and reels, and he was using modern tackles at that time. That was something that drew me like a magnet, that one day I will catch fishes like that. So this is how actually I became a fisherman.

Nasim Hasan [00:05:14] Well, it started in 19, in 2010. I was watching the famous Jeremy Wade program, River Monsters, and that was his Indian show for Goonch, and it was, you know, it was a tremendous program. It was fabulous, that all the hard work he was doing, everything, it took like, two months for him to catch the Goonch, and, he was going through some very, very severe difficulties catching the fish. So the idea that came into my mind that, well, what is he doing? He is, he is traveling the whole northern India for a single piece of Goonch? And this fish is quite available in Bangladesh. And we don't have to give that much effort to catch that fish. Even the, bigger than that one. These thoughts were coming into my head. And then I was, I saw some other episodes of River Monsters and just thinking of inviting him to Bangladesh. We have some, maybe we don't, we have also stories that fishes that, a fish has taken away the angler into the water, and he just floated up after three days, dead. We have also stories like that, what Jeremy Wade was

running after, in fact. So, and at that time, I was searching the Internet, whether it was, whether there was any information available, regarding angling of our country. And unfortunately, there was nothing. Anyone looking to angle, come to Bangladesh to set their lines. We just had nothing, in fact. Well, at that time, maybe you have heard of Fly Fisherman, a British magazine, which was calling for articles from around the world, to promote the hot spots of, they were trying to build a database of global hotspots, in fact. And they were calling for articles from everyone around the world, and I thought of writing an article about the possibilities of some of what is special about angling in Bangladesh. And after a few days, I wrote to them, and they emailed me, and after some time, they published the article. And soon after publishing the article, I was getting a lot, by many people, you know? From the U.S., to Japan, from, you know, Russia to Croatia. Some of them were foreigners, that they were going to come to Bangladesh for financial business or some other purpose. Some Bangladeshi residents living abroad, maybe want to come to Bangladesh for, for couple of days on vacation. And there were also, all of them were asking for, if there is any possibility to spend a day or two fishing out on Dhaka, or in places like Sylhet, you know. So that's how it started, actually. Then, I felt the need of building a knowledge base, where anglers, or interested people, could log in to have some ideas of how Bangladeshi angling could be. And how, and help them with some information. Whoever wants to come to Bangladesh. So that's how, in fact, Angling in Bangladesh took [unintelligible]. And soon after, you know, angling, establishing Angling In Bangladesh, I felt that well, it's, it's parallelly important to build an internal community of anglers, inside my country. So, without a vibrant community, it will not be easy for a person like me to do anything and [unintelligible]. So then I build, you know in, in Bangladesh, we are so much on Facebook than on Twitter or some other social media platforms. So I built a Facebook page, named Angling in Bangladesh, and it became like, booming in a very short time. It was something like, people were searching for this and somewhat I have provided them, at that moment. The timing was perfect and everything was like happening too fast. And I got some extraordinary people. I had some extraordinary people to work with me, to build in this regard. Especially, I must mention the name of [unintelligible] a he's an avid angler, he's a competition winner angler in Bangladesh. And some friends from Sylhet, northern districts, people from all over the country were coming forward, to helping me with information with everything that I want. And I must appreciate that without their help, it would not be possible for me to come this far with Angling in Bangladesh. And that's how it started. And now it's been like, more than eight years, we are operating in Bangladesh. And, of course, I have planned lots of things we are working on this project on Angling In Bangladesh. I've come to know people like politicians, policy makers, university professors, Ph.D. students, defense officers, lots of people have, I never even imagined that I would come to get, for interview, if there had not been any [unintelligible].

James Thull [00:12:50] That's wonderful. Well, that's great. And I think you're doing a great service to, to Bangladesh, and anglers around the world. So it's a wonderful site.

Nasim Hasan [00:12:58] I don't know. I'm just, it's, still it's, I'm just trying. And I'm just trying to give Bangladesh a branding that I, just leave the branding and other things, they're just big words. I just want to give the global angler a message that: yes, Bangladesh is also a great destination for angling. You can come, you can enjoy fishing here. We have some exotic species, both saltwater and freshwater, that you, that's worthy of trying. You can come here and, yeah. And also, I want to tell them that; okay, maybe we are, we will not be able to give you five-star accommodation. Maybe we will not be able to provide you all the air conditioning while fishing. Maybe food would be a problem, but if you want pure adventure, pure, pristine, raw adventure, and if you want like, enjoy nature

from it's full stage, then you can just consider Bangladesh, as your destination. This is the message that I want to give to our global angler friends.

Nasim Hasan [00:14:31] Well, first of all, we have an infrastructural development. We have everything. And also anglers from, global, global anglers have also, an interest to come to Bangladesh, as well. But what is driving them away from Bangladesh is a matter of research. From my understanding, I think there are some sort of fears that are keeping them away from coming to Bangladesh, and enjoying fishing. And another thing is, the lack of focus from government perspectives, from media, and from operators who are working in Bangladesh. But there is a lack of understanding, what angling can do to our tourism industry of the country. And these lackings are maybe keeping the problem, that global anglers are not as versed. When a huge amount of people, good amount of operators are working together, this will give a positive vibe to global anglers that, 'Yeah, something is going on over there. Something is going on over there, maybe I can choose my next destination to Bangladesh. Maybe for a day or two, at least.' Maybe, on his way to Thailand or India, for fishing. You can spend a day or two in Bangladesh fine. But, in fact, there is no focus from our stakeholders, policy-makers, that make the global anglers interested to come to Bangladesh. This is one factor. And the other factors are the lack of [unintelligible] a proper [unintelligible]. You know, an angler from America, or an angler from France, or U.K. wouldn't come to Bangladesh to catch a carp of three or four kgs. No, they will come to Bangladesh to have something exotic. To have a good fight, to have a good experience with some local species. So this is another factor that, if I invite them to come, where shall I take them to, for fishing? Around the world, there are lots of people are polluting our saltwater. So, if we exclude saltwater from our, currently, just for the time being, if we want to focus on just sweetwater species, what are we all finding for coming to Bangladesh? To, to, to come and fish? Carps are available in the UK and France. People won't come to Bangladesh to catch like 3 pound, 4 pound [unintelligible] or a Cutlass. Yeah Cutlass can grow like, up to 30 or 40 kg, but we have stocks of that fish, that size if we want to bring them here, in Bangladesh. So, this is a big problem. And most of the water bodies that are supposed to hold fishes of that size, of that, or that kind, are basically owned by private organizations. Or even, or even leased to private organizations by the government. And we cannot operate effective. Those, those are reserved, those are treated as commercial, fishes are raised for completely commercial purposes. So to operate somewhere, we need our conservation. For species, or a size of fish, which we are lacking here in Bangladesh. And also we have rivers, like some of the greatest rivers of the world have fallen into the Bay of Bengal, through Bangladesh, and these rivers are like gold mines. But to operate in those rivers, we need some government focuses, or government, government help, and also private help, together. And we are lacking that. You know, I don't know whether any government officials, or Department of Fisheries in Bangladesh, have proper understanding of what angling can do to our marginal fishermen. So unless we have a proper understanding, on angling as a whole, and its economic benefits in the country, maybe it will be very hard for us to do something in that extent. That, what I'm not...

James Thull [00:19:55] Envisioning?

Nasim Hasan [00:19:55] Yeah, envisioning.

Nasim Hasan [00:20:03] Well, I have lost my count. I can, I can, I can tell you the name of my previous six generations. My father and his father, his father, his father, his father, up to six people. And from my mother's side, I can mention five people. Well, let me tell you, [unintelligible] is the home of my father's place, my mother's place, my father's

grandmother's place, grandfather's place, and my mother's grandfather's place. So I don't have anywhere else to go. And all is, I have a very extended family here. It's a very big family I have here. My mother's side, my father's side, and their maternal sides. So altogether, mine is a very vast family, and I can tell that we have a history of like three hundred years here, or so.

Nasim Hasan [00:21:11] Yeah, yeah, that's, you know, that's why, I told you earlier that, reserve or a destination, a good destination for, uh, overseas, interested anglers, is really greasy to operate properly in this section. So that's why we have started a project, it's very close to Dhaka, which you have already visited. And it's a, you can call it a semi-wild angling destination. It's a natural water body. It gets flooded fully, during monsoon. And when it's winter, it's dry season, a portion of this water body is still filled with lots of wild fish, and sus, sus. We don't sustain them. So this water body is like, uh, 25 acres? Of water body. It's completely flooded in the monsoon. So we are building a reserve over there. Currently, we have some species of Snakeheads and Grills, and some of the local cat species. And we are going to release some carp species as well, different types of carps. And we have all of the plan of operating this reserve, from maybe September of this year. That's how it came. And yeah, I will, I will let you know the progress there.

James Thull [00:23:12] I appreciate that. And with the exception of the occasional barbecue,

Nasim Hasan [00:23:17] Yeah, yeah.

James Thull [00:23:18] It'll be catch and release?

Nasim Hasan [00:23:19] Yeah, it will be, it will be like, you know, that's why, that's why we will try to maintain a healthy stock of fish. All the year round. And also we have, we, this is a project that we want to include local villager's insight. That, you know, water bodies like this are very common in Bangladesh, all over Bangladesh. Wherever you go, you will find things like this, around the whole country. But these water bodies are not [unintelligible]. These are, these are our assets. And we can do lots of things, utilizing these water bodies. We cannot draw across in those marshlands. Maybe, sometimes, if a rancher just shows us mercy, villagers can have a little vegetables, or something. From those lands. Other than that, all the year round, they're like, bare lands. We cannot produce anything off of those lands. So fishery can be a huge source of, or a good way of utilizing those, lands like those. And as, we don't, we don't change the natural flow of water. Water can come in, and go during monsoon, and when that water goes, a portion of them still will be able to produce their rice, or whatever they want to do. And when it's monsoon, when there is nothing to do, they also can be benefited by fish. If, if fish is properly cultivated over there. If we, if we are able to, like, make something positive out of these things. So, so we, we are trying to make it, we, we, we have kept it small, initially. 20, 35 acres it's, maybe, it's very little. But if we are successful with this project, maybe in one or two years, you have, you have seen that there is a vast body of vacant land, above water, vacant water body just beside my project which, which we are working right now. If we are successful with this, then we will expand to that water body, also. And this will bring a tremendous change of income in marginal villagers, and village fishermen, the grassroot fishermen of our community. So, so as we will maintain a good, healthy stock of fish over there. Initially, we will try to keep it catch and release. And maybe once, twice, or thrice in a year, we will throw competitions like catch and keep, as much as we can catch. Maybe it will be, you don't know, you are not acquainted with angling competitions in Bangladesh right? It's something like, 200 or 300 people are fishing side by side. Okay. And in a very congested

area and they are catching fish, and you know, each of them like, they catch like 50, 40, hundred kgs, kilos of fish, in a single session. And this is what Bangladeshi people, we call it fishmongering, not angling, you know? So maybe for the purpose of the business, we'll have to organize events like this once, once or twice in a year. And other than that, all the year round, my project will be open for overseas guests, or enthusiasts, who want to come to Bangladesh, or who are working in Bangladesh, and want to spend his weekend fishing with family, or along with friends. Okay. And initially, we are telling that it will be, like, catch and release, but after, after. But we will, we will arrange in a very limited places to give some of the services as well. Suppose, if you come with your family. And you want to, you have caught some decent sized of fish and you want to have some, one or two, you want to have one or two on your lunch, barbecued. Of course, we will provide you, we are a generous nation. You know? And this is little fish. So your satisfaction will be my utmost will.

Nasim Hasan [00:29:13] Well, it's some kind of like, it's a boost to me. It's some kind of job. You know, after, after working, working, working, working, you need to escape the reality, the harsh reality of life. And you need to escape the busy schedule of life. And angling gives you that oxygen to work for the next month, or next two months, you know. There's, and, and, and the rush of blood when, when, when you have a decent size of fish on the other side. On the, on the, on your line, Goonch, you know the feeling, how it feels, that feeling, it brings me [unintelligible] and happiness. After just landing that fish, I don't want nothing else. Just those few minutes, or ten, 20 minutes with a decent size of fish. That feeling drives me very crazy, completely crazy, and that feeling brings me over and over to fish.

Nasim Hasan [00:30:34] During '80s, or late '80, early '90s, mid-'90s, those are the, I mean, the golden time for fishing knowledge. Wherever you go. Now, you see a water body flowing in front of you, you set lines, you are getting fish, decent size of fish, unexpected size of fish at that time, those times. And those are the times when industrialization has taken place in Bangladesh; late '80s and mid-'90s. And it's going on, to date. And, you know, for the family, we were like very happy that, well, lots of employment are being generated and lots of things are happening. The price of lands are rising up in my locality, this is very good. But gradually after like 20, 25 years, what now? From my perspective, I see that it would be better, if these things had not taken place in my, in my locality what we have, maybe what we have, we've been able to generate employment for, like 800,000 of people who have gone completely from marginal groups and very far, farthest corners for Bangladesh. But we are, what are we paying those companies who are working in Bangladesh right now, will go to other places if, when, if we don't, you know? When, if we are, if they are not able to generate profit from here, they will simply go to other places. They will seek other manufacturing hubs. Maybe they will go to Africa, maybe they will go to the farthest corners of Asia, or somewhere else. But we will have to live with what we have, and if those things are destroyed, how will we, how our next generations will sustain and survive? This, this concerns me the most, you know? These rivers, these canals, these are our assets. But, you know, environmental costs for the sake of growth, this is kind of, I cannot accept it. Yeah.

James Thull [00:33:32] Shortsighted.

Nasim Hasan [00:33:33] Yeah. Growth is important, for any nation. But for what cost? Destroying our rivers, destroying our soil, our lands, our air, polluting our air. You know, how many people, how many kids are suffering from kidney diseases right now? Dhaka City is completely unpure, it's not liveable right now. It's one of the worst, the air condition

in Dhaka is the worst in the world. So these are the things that concerns me the most. And if there is no water, there will be eventually no fish. The river that I was going on, playing in, swimming in, is now completely a mess, right now. In just 15 years. In just 15 years, it has been turned into a dark, something that we cannot call a river, a vibrant flow of water, which was like, right, 15 years ago, it was completely destroyed. Even you will not be able to find insects in that river, let alone the fish.

James Thull [00:34:52] So, certainly industrial pollution is a concern here?

Nasim Hasan [00:34:57] Industrial pollution and driving off and feeding off rivers. You know, this is another concern that, have you, you do, do, are you acquainted with the terms land grabbers, the river grabbers?

James Thull [00:35:17] Certainly. Yes.

Nasim Hasan [00:35:18] Oh, you do. So these are the factors that concerns me the most, rivers are being, you know, how they're [unintelligible]. Garbages from cities are taken to some river, some remote side of river, and they are dumped beside the river first, and after a dumping is filled up and then, soil is put over that garbage and thus, this way, rivers are filled. Just one day, overnight, you will see the structure of our village on the river. And who are doing this? Mostly [unintelligible] people. People with tremendous power and money. Not, not general people like you and me are going there grabbing land, grabbing rivers, doing things. Of course, they're very influential people. With lots of power and money. They are bringing, they are filling the river for their own benefits. And this is, this concerns me the most. This is, maybe we will be able to stop pollution by enforcing the existing laws. But if we don't stop grabbing, river grabbing, river filling, then nothing will change, in terms of Bangladesh. And another thing is, where there are big fishes, big water bodies like rivers, chance of rivers are possessed by these kinds of people. You know, the self-declared landlords, like people, you know? And they control those water bodies, and the hundreds of families of fishermen. They control their activities and they have to take, what is that? Tax. This tax doesn't go to the government, you know? This tax goes to their pockets. Chances of rivers are distributed at [unintelligible] a whenever the political systems, those people have changed, those people have changed. The system remains the same [unintelligible]. So these are the concerns that, that's a drawback from working to promote Bangladeshi angling to global anglers, you know? And yeah, this, this is, these kinds of things can be overcome by catch and release. Ok, your fishes, your fishes remain here, we will just catch and we will just release. So then you can do whatever you want, this is not a concern, a big deal. But if these things continue, like next 12, 15 year, 20 years, then, maybe, you'll have the rebirth of Bangladesh owned by people. Not the, the people of Bangladesh, a few, a few people. So this is another thing that concerns me most, that most public assets are grabbed by a few.

Nasim Hasan [00:39:11] Climate change? Yes. Because being a, you know, I think you have read research papers that Bangladesh, and Bangladesh and South Asian countries are the most affected ones. Yeah. For the for the rise of sea levels, and the climate change, the global warming. These are affecting our... Fishes have changed their habitats. The rivers are filled, siltation has changed the course of the rivers, and yeah, but we are not doing too well, because most of our rivers are coming through India. And India has built hundreds of dams on the upstreams of rivers, and they are not giving us the water we are supposed to get. India is cutting our water. This conflict, everything, everyone knows it. And there is, there is a case going on in the International Court of Arbitration regarding this dispute of water. The Ganges have come through India, to Bangladesh, and it has finally

fallen to Bay of Bengal. And the Farakka Dam has [unintelligible] in India, by, by Indian people. Our northern districts, they are dried, almost dried, because we are not getting enough water. This is affecting the most in Bangladesh, than the climate change. We are not getting, our rivers are not getting enough water. And because of the climate change, there is not enough rainfall sometimes, and there are too much rainfall sometimes. And because the rivers have lost their depth, it gets flooded. The, the populations, the neighboring people get, get flooded, flooded. Lives are destroyed every year, because we don't have, our rivers don't have that capacity of holding the water. This is a problem. And our rivers also don't have enough water. They're not getting enough water. This is another problem. But southern Bangladesh, because there is no sewage water, freshwater flow to the estuaries of our water, the salinity of those areas are getting, rising dramatically, and those places are not, the people of those places are not able to cultivate on their land because of this salinity and stuff, and we don't know whether any kind of disease or any kind of outbreak goes, this, because of salinity. We don't know the long term.

James Thull [00:42:27] Sure.

Nasim Hasan [00:42:27] Effects. Because there is not enough research on this. So yeah, we are having multiple types of problems, because of this environmental change, climate change, global warming. Yeah, we are being affected. Our, you know, this time of year it would rain like every day and these types of hot, heat. We haven't, at least I can tell you that I haven't experienced heat like this in the last ten years, like this. So this is the direct results of global warming. And you've seen the other places also, maybe you have seen in Thailand and other places.

James Thull [00:43:25] All over, yeah, everywhere.

Nasim Hasan [00:43:29] The animals, their behavior have changed. The behavior of, as I'm working on fish species, I can tell you, the behavior of fish, aquatic animals have changed dramatically, they're getting more unpredictable, day by day. Maybe in like, 10 or 12 years before, we would fish frequently. But it's very hard to get a decent size of fish, maybe you'll have to wait two or three months after sessions and sessions, sessions of angling, you will get a decent size of fish. These other factors that concern me the most. Not only me, but also, of course, thinking of climate change, global warming. So altogether, we are in a very vulnerable situation, I must state, I must tell to you, but I'm working on angling. But, I don't know how long we can go in a situation like this, where we don't have enough water, we don't have enough fish, we don't have, we have lots of problems. The political, local, other problems, also global warming, and all together, it is a very, it's getting very challenging.

Nasim Hasan [00:45:06] Okay. So, uh, one of my younger friends, he was, he called me the other day, the day before I caught the fish. He called me that, "Hey, brother, I want to go to the [unintelligible] lake for fishing. Would you like to join me?" I said, "Oh well, I have some work to do. I don't know. Well, if I can manage, I will join you." And he went in the morning. And at that time, those, those friends who you met today, the previous day, they went to, like, they went to a lake, which we call [unintelligible]. [Unintelligible] it's, it's on the way to Chittagong. Yes, very close to Chittagong. They went over there for catching a good size of bass species. Which they caught over there. And there was, there were at that time, they were students of that university. And after, they were trying to catch a decent size of bass species, and they couldn't and they went to [unintelligible] because [unintelligible] was a home of some giant of those bass species, like thirty, thirty-five kilos. And they had camping of two days over there, two days and two nights over there. And

they got nothing, and the day they return to campus, and that day I was fishing over there. And after coming back to campus, they called me, "Brother, we have returned, where are you? And I said, "I'm fishing." They said, "Where?" I said, "Well, over here, that lake." And by that time, we, I have, I just caught that fish, you know, it was, 15 kilo Catla. The scientific name is Catla Catla.

James Thull [00:47:13] Catla Catla?

Nasim Hasan [00:47:13] Catla Catla, yeah. In Thailand, they have a different type of Catla, we call it Siamese Catla. It grows like 70, 80 kilos.

James Thull [00:47:21] Oh, Siamese Catfish?

Nasim Hasan [00:47:21] Yes.

James Thull [00:47:22] Siamese Catfish?

Nasim Hasan [00:47:22] No, Siamese Catfish, Siamese Catla.

James Thull [00:47:26] Catla? Siamese Catla?

Nasim Hasan [00:47:26] C-A-T-L-A.

James Thull [00:47:29] Okay.

Nasim Hasan [00:47:31] And this is one of the most desired species in Bangladesh, Catla Catla. Okay, so it was a very hot day. It was November, but it was a very hot day. I missed a couple of bites, initially, because it was a like, sloping. The place where we put the rods, where we leave the rods, is very sunny, sunny place, and it was like severe. So after placing the rods, we, I stood in the shade. And three or four times, my line was dragging, like mad. And as soon as I came to my rods, it stopped. You know, the timing was like, and then, I was just sitting over there, in tremendous heat. 'Okay, next time, I will not let it go, whatever it comes,' and I just held the rod, you know? It was like, dragging the line like hell. I fought like 16, somewhat like 20 minutes, but I have a video of 16 minutes of fighting with that monster. Unfortunately, it died. Okay, so, it was a hell of an experience. And after, oh, when they saw the fish, they said, "Oh brother, what have you done? We have been looking for this species for months and months. And you have caught it just in one day. No, no, no, this is not fair. You shouldn't, you should have not caught this fish. You should have come a few more days before catching this species." [laughs].

Nasim Hasan [00:49:31] Well, my first choice, I would go to Nepal. I would go to Nepal to fish for a golden Trout. And for [unintelligible]. And that's my dream species. And if someone comes to me, to take me fishing anywhere I want to go, I would go to Nepal. That's my dream destination.