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Bioprospecting in Bangladesh and Rakhain community: A critical investigation of practices and effects of appropriation and translation of indigenous knowledge

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Bioprospecting (BP), a term first introduced by (Reid et al., 1996, p.1), describes the practice of collecting and screening plants and other biological materials for commercial purposes (Dutfield, 2001). This research paper is a critical analysis of the global-local (“glocal”) practices and politics of bioprospecting (BP) with a focus on the Rakhain community in Bangladesh, given the recent rush in research by Bangladeshi scientists aimed at exploiting indigenous knowledge. Recent ‘conversion’ of indigenous knowledge into private property represents a continuation of colonial conquest masked by so-called neo-liberal market principles, and there is evidence it has pushed local indigenous communities backward in their socio-economic life, raising concerns that it may increase tension between indigenous people and the state of Bangladesh. The paper will be situated in critical indigenous methods (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008) with observational fieldwork, interview as conversation and survey methods that will follow ethical principles to guide the researcher’s practices and interactions so that they do not cause disadvantage to the community further (Smith, 1999). An approach to research informed by local knowledge, and which is ethical, reflective and pro-active in relation to the sensitivities and politics surrounding local knowledge will enhance our understanding of practices and politics of bioprospecting in Bangladesh as well as their effects.

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