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All that Climate Change Does : Maheshabeel and the 2022 Silchar Flood

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All that Climate Change does:
Mahishabeel and the 2022 Silchar Flood

Debashree Chakraborty

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Introduction

Climate change is touted to be a great facilitator of change. Academic expertise, media and popular culture etc., stress on its power of being the greatest driver of change. But how is this change going to manifest itself is a question that needs to be asked more often as climate change, as a phenomenon continues to take central stage. Instances of climate change activities show that the effects of it can impact the world in more ways than meets the eye. While the well-known effects of climate change like famine, droughts, displacement, etc., continue to be discussed and understood, the layered and complex effects often miss the sight.

Locating climate change as the reason of a certain weather-related activity is a challenge at times but even more challenging is the task of representing and understanding climate change in its entirety. For example, how profound or subtle could these changes be? Is climate change only about causing sweeping changes in terms of macro units like geography and demography or is it also about micro social changes in terms of fanning of polarised narratives, religious and social disgruntlements, misrepresentation, etc.

This paper would attempt at locating the micro effects of climate change by taking into account a study of the 2022 flood in Silchar, Assam. These effects, subtle and complex in nature are often times consequences of cultural practices, prevailing socio-political discourses, popular culture practices, etc., and are channelised in ways which are difficult to apprehend. These changes are frequently glossed over as these do not come with the weight of sounding data heavy. However, these are symptomatic of the evolution of deep-rooted social set ups and practices grounded in the ideas of otherisation.

While the cause of the flood was attributed to irregular pre-monsoon showers by experts, the real reason took a toss when a group of people was put under the glare and was accused of intentionally breaching an old embankment in order to flood the city. A calamity that seemingly has climate change as its cause was spuriously given the colour of being a consolidated assault on the city by miscreants driven by vested interests thus unfolding a polarised and sensational narrative of climate change. This brings forth an interesting case of what climate change can do. While it can mean destruction and disintegration, it can also aid in jeopardising existing faults in socio-political spheres. This paper would try to understand the aftermath of the floods in Silchar by looking into how climate change played its part not only with regards to the flood but also how, it became one of the reasons of aggravating socio-cultural and political fault lines.

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Silchar and Floods

Silchar is a city located in the southern part of Assam. It is the district headquarters of Cachar district and the administrative capital of Barak Valley[1] division of Assam. It is a densely populated area and according to the 2011 census report[2], its population density is 8,524 per square kilo metre. The city is 35 meters above mean sea level and is surrounded by the Barail Hills Range[3]. It is located in an alluvial flat plain, spotted with swamps, bisected by streams and surrounded by isolated small hills (locally known as *tillas*). The topography of the city is mainly of a highly undulated and broken nature and it is vulnerable to the natural disasters like floods, cyclones, earthquakes, hail storms etc. During the rainy season, the river Barak over flows and causes heavy flood to the town. Inundation is a common phenomenon in Silchar and the reasons are multiple. A natural cause is of course the presence of the Ghagra river, a distributary[4] of the Barak in the west side of the city and other streams running across the city. As the rainfall becomes intense during peak monsoon months, the Barak dislodges its excess water volumes to these streams which run across the city and neighbouring areas get flooded for short spans. Given the fact that Barak Valley is a flood plain[5], flooding is generally considered to be a regular and normal occurrence. However, with increasing population density in the city and unplanned development all around, these floods have worsened and acquired a character that is at variance with the usual nature of floods.

Owing to its geographical location, Silchar has a borderline tropical monsoon climate[6] meaning that it has a prolonged rainy wet season with up to (and sometimes in excess of) 1,000 mm of precipitation observed per month for two or more consecutive months and less variance in temperature. A meteoblue chart shows that in peak monsoon months, the average daily rainfall in Silchar can reach up to 502mm[7]. It may be noted here that a monthly average precipitation of 150mm is generally considered to be 'wet'[8]. The 'wet' season begins early as the monsoon moves into the region during April, with the result that for seven months of the year Silchar has hot and humid weather with heavy thunderstorms almost every afternoon until the middle of October when there is usually a brief period of hot and relatively dry weather before the cool season sets in during November. The number of days of precipitation between the months of May to September clock ranges from 27.8 days to 29.7 days with July and August going up to 30.8 days.[9] These numbers are based on data that have been collected in the last 30 years. This goes on to show that Silchar is a place that witnesses huge amounts of rainfall every year. The local rainfall run off of the valley along with that of adjacent hilly areas flows through river Barak and its various tributaries and is drained out to Bangladesh.

The 564 kilometres long Barak River is part of Surma-Meghna River System. It rises in the hill state of Manipur where it is biggest and most important of hill country rivers. After Manipur it flows through Mizoram and Assam. It later enters Bangladesh where it forks into Surma and Kushiyara rivers. The local rainfall run off of the valley along with that of adjacent hilly areas flows through river Barak and its various tributaries and is drained out to Bangladesh. The Katakhal, Jiri, Chiri, Modhura, Longai, Sonai, Rukni and Singla are the main tributaries of the valley. The tributaries are mainly rain fed and cause flood problems when precipitation occurs. The Barak sub-basin drains areas in India, Bangladesh and Burma. This copious amount of rainfall combined with the physical features of the valley generally cause flooding as is the norms in a flood plain.

It may be noted here that for flood plains to thrive, it is important that they are flooded. Floods are part of a natural ecological process in flood plains. Flooding recharges groundwater systems, removes invasive plant species like water hyacinth from wetlands, and fills wetlands and

redistributes sediment and nutrients across the landscape. For many species, floods trigger breeding events, migration and dispersal of seeds across the area of the flood plains of the particular river system. These natural systems of species which include agricultural crops as well are resilient to the effects of floods and are therefore crucial to the food chain as these help sustain both human and non-human populations. Besides the environmental benefits, flooding also boosts the economy by increasing agricultural and fish production and recharging groundwater resources, among other advantages.[10] The problem arises when the natural cycle of flooding is disrupted through human intervention.

Owing to its being a part of the flood plain, Silchar city witnesses regular floods. However, what is actually a natural phenomenon has only worsened over the years as the city continues to expand. Being a Tier 3[11] city, Silchar has seen momentous but unstructured urbanisation since the past decade. Such a rapid spate of urbanisation has meant unplanned growth and mushrooming of residential areas at sites that are supposed to be left untouched. It is important to note here that the core city area of Silchar is interspersed with wetlands and ox-bow lakes which are important to the riverine ecology of the Barak River. Also, the river is of highly meandering nature. The name Barak itself originates from *Bodo-Baak* (Bodo– Big; Baak– Bends/Meanders). Bank erosion is a natural phenomenon for meandering rivers in alluvial stretches. The meandering rivers undergo morphological changes due to bank erosion and sedimentation from banks and beds.[12]

The river plain form characteristics around the town are associated directly with natural hazards such as bank erosion and floods, affecting the social and economic condition of people living in and around Silchar town. Shifting river course, on one hand is displacing people from its bank and on the other is raising doubts on the stability of river course in extreme flood conditions. Erosion of banks due to meandering nature of river Barak is a major safety issue in the region threatening households, agricultural lands, and roads.[13]

The 2022 Silchar Floods

The 2022 floods in Silchar, Assam began on 19 June 2022[14], when the river Barak breached an old dyke in Bethukandi, a few kilometers away from the city. Within a few hours, the entire city was flooded and waters rose at alarming levels giving little time to the residents to salvage their goods. The suddenness of the event was shocking. The rescue operations began with the NDRF, SDRF and the army in action. Given the challenges that the rescue teams met with, they went on to claim that this was the most devastating urban flooding they have ever witnessed. The flood waters took almost 15 days to recede from the entire city. While the reasons behind such devastating flood are multiple, the immediate cause was definitely the inordinate amount of rainfall that lashed the city from 17 June. While India received 152.3 mm rainfall, 8% below the normal June rainfall of 165.3 mm as per India Meteorological department, Silchar received 858.1 mm precipitation in the month of June 2022.[15]

Now, to add context to the floods, 2022 also witnessed what is now termed as the Assam-Bangladesh flood or the India-Bangladesh flood which occurred in three phases. According to the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), the state saw a devastating series of floods that started at the beginning of April and went on until the end of October. The floods started in the month of April following excessive pre-monsoon showers. This has been termed as the first wave of flood (6 April 2022-12 June 2022)[16]. Figures suggest that between 1 March to 20 May 2022, the average rainfall in Assam was approximately 719mm which is 65% more than the general average of 434.5 mm.[17] While the figure of 719mm is the highest in the last 10 years, in April 2022 alone, Assam

received rainfall that was 127% above its general average. However, according to a Skymet[18] report, in the four years preceding 2022, that is from 2018-2021, Assam ran a rainfall deficit of sorts during the pre-monsoon[19] season. It is also important to note that Assam and the Northeast region receives almost 20-25% of its annual rainfall in the pre-monsoon season. The pre-monsoon season is significant in Assam as it also determines the agriculture cycle in the state. Also, Assam is basically a floodplain with almost 40% of its total area being designated as floodplains. Every year, the Brahmaputra and the Barak or the Surma-Kushiara river systems carry huge volumes of water that come from the Eastern Himalayan region and deposit sediments across the banks of the rivers before finally flowing down to the Bay of Bengal.

While the pre-monsoon caused heavy rainfall in the region, the monsoon too brought about a lot of rainfall in Assam. The IMD ascribed the pre-monsoon showers as 'unusual'. The RMC in Guwahati noted moisture incursion from the Bay of Bengal in lower levels has caused this unprecedented pre-monsoon spell in Assam which was again an outcome of an active La Niña[20] situation in the Pacific Ocean. A senior official further noted that the typical shape of the catchment area of Assam and the ecological and climatic difference across its terrains also contribute to unusual rainfall patterns in the state. The increase in the Sea Surface Temperature or SST of Bay of Bengal by 0.2 to 0.3 degree centigrade over the last 45 years has also significantly contributed to the increasing erratic patterns of weather in Assam thus significantly impacting the climate patterns of the state as well. Climate scholarship generally contends that rise in SST would lead to more active El Nino and La Nina events around the world. El Niño events favour drought in many tropical and subtropical land areas, while La Niña events promote wetter conditions in those places. The reason behind quoting these data is to foreground the role of climate change in Assam.

In fact, the 2018 Climate Vulnerability Report[21] has identified Assam as the most vulnerable state in the Indian Himalayan region while the 2021 Climate Vulnerability Index has ranked it as the country's most climate vulnerable state. Climate change has manifested itself in the state through changing patterns of rainfall. The change in pattern has led to prolonged consecutive dry spells and shorter wet days thus resulting in excessive rainfall during the wet spells resulting in floods.

The first phase of flooding in Assam happened in April-May when the pre-monsoon showers peaked to the maximum followed by the second phase in July and the third in October. The excessive pre-monsoon showers caused the rivers to overflow and when the monsoon set in, these rivers started flowing way above their capacity thereby causing subsequent flooding. Suffice it to say, the 2022 floods in Assam were primarily a result of unusual pre-monsoon showers with irregular infrastructure and lack of planning adding more to the woes.

Now, coming back to Silchar, like the rest of Assam, Barak Valley, where Silchar is located, was also lashed with the three phases of flooding, but things took a worse turn for Silchar, which also happens to be the largest urban space of Assam after Guwahati and the hub of South Assam economy catering to not just the Valley but also to the three states of Tripura, Mizoram and Manipur. As a city, in terms of population and urban agglomeration, it has grown rapidly in the past two decades but its urban planning lacks behind staggeringly. Floods are quite common in the city and keep on repeating but the scale in which it happened in June 2022 was nothing like the city had ever seen before. But the flooding in June has a backstory that goes back to just a month before.

So, it all began in May 2022, when the last phases of pre-monsoon showers were at peak that parts of Silchar got inundated. The river Barak, unlike most other rivers, does not only dislodge its excessive waters through tributaries and distributaries. Instead, it uses up its backwaters which are locally known as 'anuas'[22] to dump its waters. Let it be mentioned here that the Barak is prone to changing its course frequently and over all this time, centuries basically, the river has formed 8

backwater bodies or anuas along its stretch. The oldest of its anuas is called Mahishabeel, around 4 kms upstream from the city. Eventually, with the course of time, this anua became a 'beel'[23], that is, a very large water body, something like a lake may be and started acting as a reservoir for the waters of the Barak River. Eventually, its banks became home to people who resorted to agriculture and fishing and created an agriculture system that was based and dependent on the water cycle of Mahishabeel. Residents around Mahishabeel noted that it is an old settlement and that their ancestors have lived around the banks for far too long. However, it may also be noted that the number of inhabitants around the beel have increased over the years following the general course of settlement practices and patterns. Around 50 years ago, when settlements were coming up in the city, Mahishabeel was separated from Barak through a dyke[24] constructed by the E&D[25]. This dyke which also functions as a road was constructed to prevent the river from changing its course, a move that seemed logical to the planning officials at that point in time keeping in mind the needs of an expanding city.

Mahishabeel, which functioned as one of the natural outlets of the river, now got detached from it. This also meant that Barak lost one of its primary drainage sources around the city of Silchar and was left with one natural outlet, a stream like water body, locally known as the Rangir Khal, to displace its excess water. While the dyke kind of kept the two water bodies separated for a long time, with the growth in settlements around the city, and due to the subsequent clogging up of the main outlet, that is the Rangir Khal, through which water drained out of the Barak to one of its distributaries, the Ghagra to finally flow into the Kushaiara, floods started to show up frequently in the city.

Similarly, in the areas around Mahishabeel also, flooding not only became more frequent but the duration of water remaining stagnant also increased. An official of the Water Works Department, informed that even though the dyke is there, water from the river never really stopped flowing into Mahishabeel. He noted that there is constant seepage of water through underground channels which increases way more during the rainy season thus not only filling up the Mahisha but also flooding its bank which is now home to a lot of people. As it has turned out the adjoining areas of Mahishabeel now remain under water for almost 8-9 months now as against 3-4 months of inundation even 10-15 years ago. Let it also be mentioned here that a characteristic feature of the beels of Barak, much like the chars of the Brahmaputra, is that these become cultivable lands during the dry months of winter thus sustaining the local population throughout the year through facilitating fishing and agriculture both.

Residents of Mahishabeel noted that prolonged bouts of water standing in and around the beel has severely affected them. The agriculture cycle has been compromised thus denting their economic prospects leading them to move away from the homes and seek work elsewhere. Also, since vast areas remain under water for long stretches of time, residents of the beel area have to stay elsewhere—either in makeshift houses or *tran shibirs* in schools which is yet another problem as setting up relief centres in schools mean no classes. Such situations jeopardise the prospects of education of the local children and the residents complained that they have been lagging behind in aspects of education and health due to this strange situation of water remaining stagnant for the better part of the year.

But presently, due to the prevailing conditions with the dyke and increasing rainfall, the livelihood of the people living around Mahisha remains threatened. These residents who have been living there for a long time now holding patta settlements thus demanded for a sluice gate[26] to be made at a point so that stagnant water in the Mahisha could be drained out after the rains get over and when the levels of water in the Barak recede to normal. This sluice gate has been a long-standing

demand of the locals. With a lot of delay and deliberations, one MLA finally took note of it and initiated the construction of a sluice gate in 2018. But due to multiple reasons which also include infighting between MLAs, the project got shelved. The half-constructed sluice gate still stands at Bethukandi, a Muslim residential area of the Mahishabeel area.

Pic 1: Half-constructed sluice gate at Bethukandi, Mahishabeel.

In 2022, when the pre-monsoon showers lashed Assam, Barak too started flowing past its normal level. Mahishabeel received dual load owing to both the rainfall and the seepage of river water into it and flooded its banks in the month of April itself. This angered the locals. In the meantime, the government officials visited Mahisha to inspect the conditions and were met with brisk resistance from the locals who gave the officials an ultimatum. They demanded that the administration must make the sluice gate functional so that water would drain out or else they would take matters in their hand and breach a section of the dyke to drain out water.

The officials listened to them and left. The sluice gate remained as it were and the deadline given by the locals too passed. But the locals acted upon their word and cut open a section of the dyke right next to where the half-constructed sluice gate stands in Bethukandi to drain out water. In the next few days, the part of Mahishabeel that was inundated in the month of April cleared away thus relieving the residents. As news of this breach reached the administration, a team came to visit the area. They chided the locals a little bit for causing harm to public property but did not go

overboard since a receded water level also meant less work for them. However, they did not do anything to fix the section of the dyke that was cut open.

The pre-monsoon showers too ended in the next few days giving way to a short dry spell. Nobody remembered what happened in Mahishabeel barring a few activists whose pleas of fixing the breached dyke did not reach anywhere. Soon came the month of June and the monsoon showers started. One June 18, Silchar received 251 mm of rainfall, the highest in 12 yrs. The river started swelling but this time, it had an open outlet, the hole in the dyke, to gush its water out. And sure it did. On 19 June, in the early hours of the morning, huge volume of water started entering the city. These waters were just not normal offload of the river but it was the river which had actually gushed inside the town. The other natural outlet, the Rangir khal, which by now has lost its width and depth both, could not handle this sudden out spurt. On top of that, right at the point where Rangir khal meets the Ghagra river, the distributary, a sluice gate of width 5mts has been constructed while the natural width of the Rangir Khal is between 10-13 meters. Also, the entire Khal is clogged with settlement thus preventing water to flow freely. In the absence of proper waste disposal mechanism at place in the city, residents have been dumping a lot to dump their household waste in the khal. All these factors made it all the more difficult for the excess water to attain its regular streamline flow in the khal thus ending up overflowing the city. Till this point, one can understand that the June floods in Silchar were related to two issues—1. unusual rainfall pattern as a result of climate change 2. unplanned urban expansion and lack of foresight in implementing of infrastructure activities. The points to note here is that in the case of Silchar floods, even though climate change led to excessive rainfall that occurred during the pre-monsoon and monsoon seasons. The flooding was also a result of lack of urban planning. But something else also happened after the flood waters hit the city.

When the dyke was initially breached in April, news of it did not make it to headlines in the city. Very few people knew of it. But when the flood water lashed out again in June, this incident came to the fore and there was a ready reaction to it—news spread out that a group of people has intentionally breached the dyke to flood the city. A certain section of the national media on the other hand termed it as 'flood jihad' and started running news accusing the Muslim community of deliberately trying to cause harm to the city. The district administration and the police were of course quick to take action and the rumours did not spread for too long.

Interestingly, the population around Mahishabeel is predominantly Muslim. Investigations by local activists revealed that the dyke was cut by those people whose house remained under water for the longest time and they belonged to both the Hindu and Muslim communities. The breaching of the dyke was the last of the measure that these affected people employed in order to save themselves. Their action was motivated as a result of years of neglect accorded to them. Their decision to breach the dyke in April was prompted out of their plight and this wasn't hidden from the administration.

It may be noted here that as a post-Partition settlement, Silchar is a politically charged up place. And with the NRC process still fresh in the memory, it is also a space that is intensely ridden with conflicts of political identity which tow among religious, ethnic and linguistic contestations. If we look at this incident through the lens of conflict, we can understand that the instant victimisation of the Muslim community was not a standalone incident but a continuation of otherisation rooted against the backdrop of intense religious polarisation. This brings us to the question; can climate change acting up in the form of natural disasters push societies into the throes of conflicts or flare up existing conflicts thus threatening the social and poltical fabrics?

Another thing to note here is the way a section of the national media sensationalised the news of the flood. Most did not mention the words climate change even once and instead set up panels to discuss whether there was indeed any unscrupulous activity involved or not. An issue as

humane as flood and as timely as climate change went into the backburner as polarised narrative with a religious angle took the centre stage.

Locating climate change as the cause of irregular weather events is in itself a daunting task because the variables associated in determining such change are disparate and spread across time. It is a slow onset process. Probably, one of the ways of addressing climate change is to accept that it is real and happening around us even though it is not visible per se. But the way the 2022 Silchar floods or for that matter, the Assam floods were reported by media showed more signs of denial than acceptance. This again brings forth the question of mitigation and the role of media. Climate change related incidents and more importantly, the ways of representing it in media and popular culture have always been a matter of discussion. A media sphere dominated by clickbait, algorithms, and manufactured anger can hardly levy stress on climate change which also brings with it questions of accountability and critical understanding of the process itself. [27] While sensational journalism can create hype around a certain climate change event, it is certainly not immediate enough to earn the attention of the public regarding climate change itself. On the contrary, it actually diminishes the urgency of climate change and puts around it a façade that prohibits people to know really what

Effects of climate change, as we know oscillate within a number of frameworks like destruction of habitats, impact on agriculture, economic loss, death, destruction, displacement etc. But at the same time, it could also lead to discord on social cohesion and act as an arbiter of social ruptures. In spaces charged up with fundamentalism of all sorts, climate change can act as a conduit of discord. The manifestation of such discords could be both long or short drawn. In Silchar, it was a short-drawn affair as the district administration and police took swift action to douse all sorts of fake narratives around it. While the quick action calls for appreciation, what remains to be thought of is the way this ludicrous narrative of 'flood jihad', with roots in religious polarisation took birth at a place that was definitely not experiencing floods for the first time. As mentioned already, Silchar is located in the flood plains of the Barak river and it has a long history of being flooded from time to time owing to natural consequences albeit exacerbated by unplanned urbanisation as well. The June 2022 floods were massive, nothing like what the city had experienced previously. So, the shock of the residents is understandable at large. But instead of holding the administration or the government accountable for the unregulated and unplanned expansion of the city, a section of the residents resorted to fake news mongering. Certain national media channels also started flashing this a piece of news thus shifting the 'gaze' from immediate and pertinent issues regarding what really caused the floods. This goes on to show that calamities could also be triggers to the ticking time bombs of social feuds which may lie dormant in certain societies. Calamities, already taxing to the psyche of those facing it, may perpetuate 'performances of disgust'.[28] The ready throwing around of blame on a community which is a minority and blatant perpetuation of communal hatred, thus, is a performance that is rooted in the 'object' of fissure or border between the two communities who have been historically and politically at loggerheads since a long time now.

This performance of hate also makes one think about the twin issues of security and vulnerability. Securitisation, meaning the public perception of an issue or phenomenon as an existential threat to society, is an act that is driven by the media in the times in which we now live. The media plays a role in moulding public perception of securitisation through the language and frames it uses to describe a particular issue as an existential threat to the public and polity. The issue could range from political and economic security to threats to cultural homogeneity and social stability.[29]

What happened in Silchar during the floods was nothing short of a dystopia— a city was engulfed in water all of a sudden completely jolting life as it were. What has been happening in

Mahishabeel for years now is a grave ecological crisis affecting the residents who have been living there for ages. Government records show that the settlement around Mahishabeel came up long before the Partition of 1947. It is important to foreground this fact because Silchar, again is largely a post-Partition settlement area. However, the residents were tight lipped about their settlement status probably due to the residual skepticism left behind by the NRC process. The case of 2022 Silchar floods is a text book example of how media captures can prevent the problems and vulnerabilities of the poor and marginalised from being debated and discussed and how it can disempower vulnerable communities and populations.[30] In this case, one can also see the impact of media securitisation extending to issues of environment as well. If one runs searches with keywords like climate change, violence, nation, security, etc.; multiple results will flash out which claim that climate change is a 'threat multiplier'. The floods, in this case, become an example, again corroborating to the reports and results that it is indeed one.

Mahishabeel's plight can probably be understood through the concept of 'slow violence'[31] as put forward by Robert Nixon and by which he means violence that is inflicted upon nature in increments. The construction of the dyke to stop the natural flow of river water to the beel and vice versa was the first instance of violence which exacerbated with time as multiple other human activities disrupted the natural flow of water along the river and its distributaries ultimately leading to the floods. This incremental violence continued unabated as settlements came up along the banks of the beel. The city too expanded exponentially and in an unplanned way. Natural outlets of the river were not even cared for and became community dump yards and so on and so forth. However, the attritional nature of this continuous violence on natural systems and processes was overshadowed by the sensationalism of the news that the dyke was breached.

After the flood was over, the administration employed pumps to drain out water from the low-lying areas of the city but no such pumps were employed in Mahishabeel and the residents continued to live logged in waterlogged in makeshift settlements for a few more months. These residents are economically and socially underprivileged and did not get the same treatment as accorded to their urban neighbours a few kms away which also brings us to the question of rights and how they change with changes in socio-economic dynamics. The flood has left behind questions which need to be dealt with and thought through as we navigate the questions of urban spaces, migration, rights and protection etc., while talking of climate change.

Pic 2: Makeshift wooden structures across the
Mahishabeel part of the Barak and one of its many meanders.

Notes and References

[1] Barak Valley, comprising the three districts of Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi in Southern Assam, is also an administrative unit of the Government of Assam. It isnamed after the river Barak which is a major river of the state and part of the Gangetic-Himalayan River system.

[2] Silchar Census Report, 2011.

[3] The Barail Range is a tertiary mountain range in Northeast India with an area of approximately 80,000 ha between Brahmaputra and Barak basins stretching from Nagaland & Manipur to the east and Assam & Meghalaya to the west.

[4] A branch of a river that does not return to the mainstream after leaving it. It is a stream channel flows away from the river after branching off of the main stream.

[5] A floodplain (or floodplain) is a generally flat area of land next to a river or stream. It stretches from the banks of the river to the outer edges of the valley.

Floodplain https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/flood-plain/

https://www.census2011.co.in/census/city/190-silchar.html

[6] An area of tropical monsoon climate (occasionally known as a tropical monsoon and trade-wind littoral climate) is a type of climate that corresponds to the Köppen climate classification category "Am". Tropical monsoon climates have monthly mean temperatures above 18 °C (64 °F) in every month of the year and a dry season. Tropical monsoon climates is the intermediate climate between the wet Af (or tropical wet climate) and the drier Aw (or tropical savanna climate).

[7] Average Temperature and Precipitation, Silchar

https://www.meteoblue.com/en/weather/historyclimate/climatemodelled/silchar_india_1256287

[8] A 'wet season' is a period of the year when a region receives the majority of its annual rainfall, essentially meaning it's the rainy season in that area. In areas where the heavy rainfall is associated with a wind shift, the wet season is known as the monsoon season. Many tropical and subtropical climates experience monsoon rainfall patterns.

[9] Cloudy, Sunny and Precipitation Days, Silchar

https://www.meteoblue.com/en/weather/historyclimate/climatemodelled/silchar_india_1256287

[10] Importance of annual floods in floodplain ecosystems like Kaziranga National Park in India

https://rhinos.org/blog/annual-floods-knp/

[11] The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) classifies cities into tiers based on population. A Tier 3 city typically has a population range between 20,000 and 49,999. They are typically regional hubs for trade, agriculture, or small-scale industries. Tier 3 cities in India are smaller urban areas that are experiencing rapid growth in population and infrastructure. They are emerging as important centers of development and growth, and are playing a key role in the economic growth of their regions.

[12]https://iwaponline.com/h2open/article/5/2/289/88774/Meandering-rivers-morphological-changes-analysis Meandering Rivers' Morphological Changes Analysis and Prediction – A Case Study of Barak river, Assam

[13] Study of Barak River Meander and Associated Hazard around Silchar Town, Assam, using Remote Sensing and GIS

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267765625_Study_of_Barak_River_Meander_and_Associated_Hazard_around_Silchar_Town_Assam_using_Remote_Sensing_and_GIS

[14] , Rainfall activities in Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Assam again resulted into the 2nd wave of flooding with a single day rise in affected population of 55.42 lakh on 21st June,2022. Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Assam recorded an excess rainfall with 94%, 329% and 235% deviation from the normal from 12th-18th June, 2022.

[15] South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People

https://sandrp.in/2022/06/30/june-2022-district-wise-rainfall-in-in-indias-sw-monsoon/

[16]The 1st wave of flood occurred due to excessive rainfall in Assam and in the neighboring States. Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Assam recorded an excess rainfall with 158%, 663% and 327% deviation from the normal from 12th-18th May, 2022 affecting a population of around 10.39 lakh.

https://asdma.assam.gov.in/sites/default/files/swf_utility_folder/departments/asdma_revenue_uneecopscloud_com_oid_70/menu/document/assam_flood_memorandum_2022.pdf

[17]https://www.sentinel-hub.com/develop/community/past-contests/resources/docs/natures_wrath_2022_silchar_floods_assam.pdf

[18]https://www.skymetweather.com/content/weather-news-and-analysis/pre-monsoon-cyclones-in-bay-of-bengal-year-2022-may-be-outlier

[19] Pre-monsoon showers, also called Mango showers in India, usually last from March to May and are quite common in the eastern part of India and also Kerala and Karnataka. These spells of shower are important for agriculture. However, over the past few years, pre-monsoons showers have increased in terms of volume of rainfall. This disrupted distribution of rainfall is generally attributed to climate change and is linked to increase in temperature in Bay of Bengal on which much of Eastern India's climate and weather activities depend.

[20] . La Niña is also sometimes called El Viejo, anti-El Niño, or simply "a cold event." La Niña has the opposite effect of El Niño. During La Niña events, trade winds are even stronger than usual, pushing more warm water toward Asia. During La Niña years, India receives normal or above-normal rainfall during the monsoon season. https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/ninonina.html

[21]

https://dst.gov.in/sites/default/files/IHCAP_Climate%20Vulnerability%20Assessment_30Nov2018_Final_aw.pdf

[22] More like an an oxbow lake. An oxbow lake is a U-shaped lake that forms when a meander in a river is cut off. It's also known as a horseshoe lake, loop lake, or cutoff lake. An oxbow lake forms when a meandering river erodes through the neck of one of its meanders. This takes place because meanders tend to grow and become more curved over time. The river then follows a shorter course that bypasses the meander. The entrances to the abandoned meander eventually silt up, forming an oxbow lake.

Anuas, however, remain connected to the river and hence, never really dry up completely. Rather, these aid n storing excess water from the river during spells of excessive rainfall.

[23] A beel is a lake-like wetland or pond with still water. Beels are found in the flood plains of the Brahmaputra and Barak rivers in Assam and Bangladesh. Beels are usually features of rivers that have a lot of meanders. Beels are rich in aquatic plants and animals and are home to many migratory birds. They help prevent floods by storing water and also purify surface water and filter out waste and pollutants. During dry seasons, Beels provide moist soil and air and become conducive for agriculture.

[24] A long wall or embankment built to prevent flooding. Dykes are usually constructed along the banks of waterbodies like rivers to seas to prevent water from flooding nearby areas during events of flooding, tidal or storm surges.

[25] The Embankment and Drainage (E&D) Department of Assam. It was a separate department of the Government of Assam until 1956. It was later merged into the Public Works Department (PWD).

[26] A sluice gate is a movable barrier that controls the flow of water in rivers, canals, dams, and other waterways. Sluice gates are also known as slide gates.

[27]https://www.earthday.org/climate-change-in-the-media-public-perception-and-the-responsibility-of-news-outlets/

[28] Sarah Ahmed, in her book *Cultural Politics of Emotions* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014) talks in detail about hate and disgust as performances by drawing from Judith Butler's seminal work on 'performative'. According to Butler, performativity relates to the way in which a signifier, rather than simply naming something that already exists, works to generate that which it apparently names. Performativity is hence about the power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration. Performativity depends upon the sedimentation of the past; it reiterates what has already been said and its power and authority depend upon how it recalls that which has already been brought into existence. Building on this idea, Ahmed opines that to perceive something/someone/a situation as hateful or disgusting is in itself a performance and such performances "rely on previous norms and conventions of speech and idea, and it generates the object that it names (93).

[29] Bhushan, Bharat. *Media and Securitisation: A Review*, p.2. Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group. 2024

[30] Ibid.

[31] Slow violence, according to Robert Nixon, refers to the process of slow, incremental and attritional violence on nature when a certain component(s) of it is systemically exploited by way of pollution, degradation or such other means which fundamentally changes the constitution of the component and renders it fallow. As examples, Nixon quoted examples of deposition of toxic waste in water bodies, pesticide and such other pollution in agricultural land or in forests, deforestation etc. In other words, 'slow violence' can be defined as attritional violence which occurs over time thus disturbing the balance of a certain area or a certain environmental component.
Nixon, Robert. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press, 2011.

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