

From Fieldwork to Drawings: Mapping the Brahmaputra Floodplains

The accelerating pace of contemporary urbanization, characterized by its homogenizing tendencies and technocratic planning paradigms, has increasingly distorted unique regional socio-cultural and ecological balances. The persistent impulse to regulate, control, and engineer natural systems has led to environmental degradation, social displacement, and a diminished capacity for resilience in the face of global warming. As the planetary consequences of global warming become more tangible, there is an urgent imperative to amend our relationship with nature.

This talk questions the widespread application of conventional development paradigms in Assam and critically examines their impact on the Brahmaputra floodplains, where such approaches are fundamentally severing the deep-rooted relationship between communities and the landscape they inhabit. It explores how visualisations and mapping can act as tools to recover suppressed spatial knowledge of the Brahmaputra floodplains. Drawing from extensive fieldwork, it traces the process that maps the complexities of the relationship between nature, community and state in the char-chaporis of Assam.

Bionote

Swagata Das is a researcher trained as an architect and urbanist. She holds a bachelor's degree in architecture from Gujarat University, India and a master's in Urbanism & Strategic Planning from KU Leuven, Belgium. Her research interests focus on the interaction between social practices and spatial configurations of the built environment. Her PhD dissertation, titled '*(re)Learning Relationships with Water*' examined ways to strengthen the socio-spatial configurations of the Brahmaputra floodplains amid the accelerating impacts of urbanisation, (infrastructural) development and climate change. Her work on the Brahmaputra has been published as book chapters and papers in international journals. She has also worked on design projects for NITI Aayog, including sustainable development plans for the Andaman & Lakshadweep Islands.

