

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

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Abstract

Climate change is termed 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/presentation would attempt at locating the micro effects of climate change by taking into account a study of the 2022 flood in Silchar, Assam. 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.