

Green Governmentality and Marginalised Populations: A Case Study of the Brahmaputra River, India

Devi NS^{1*}, Maibam M²

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^{1*} Ningombam Sympathy Devi, Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Manipur University, Canchipur, Manipur, India.

² Mangoljao Maibam, Assistant Professor, N.G. College, Imphal, Manipur, India.

The concept of Green Governmentality emerges with the rise of modern environmentalism during the 1960s and 1970s. Biopolitical ideas form the foundation of the literature on green governmentality. It relates to an art of government that implies humans must manage themselves successfully, in accordance with nature's limits, in order to achieve modernity. The rise of environmental issues in contemporary society has made a positive response for environmental politics. Environmental pollution is now regarded as a human-caused problem that cannot be ignored worldwide. Brahmaputra is one of the major rivers in India, bearing the burden of many citizens' survival and means of their livelihood. Polluting the nearby areas and the river itself causes human concerns like health hygiene, as well as having an impact on certain human activities, directly or indirectly. Many people whose socioeconomic status is below poverty lines depend on the river for survival. They are also the frontline warriors in any natural calamity that occurs in the area. Given the significance of the river and the impact of its pollution on marginalised groups of people, a call for Green Governmentality, with the collaboration of both the government and local residents, is required to improve the condition of the river and marginalised groups. The present paper aims to examine the varied impacts of pollution in the Brahmaputra River on marginalised sections of people. It also intends to highlight the importance of the necessary call for adopting green governmentality to bring about a positive change in the river and improve the living conditions of the marginalized populations.

Keywords: brahmaputra, environment, green governmentality, marginalisation, pollution

Corresponding Author

Ningombam Sympathy Devi, Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Manipur University, Canchipur, Manipur, India.

Email:

sympathyningombam77771@gmail.com

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1. Introduction

The paper aims to provide the importance and necessities of Green Governmentality in contemporary society. Today's society has become a place where multiple issues and challenges are faced by humans all over the world. Some issues and challenges are artificial while some are naturally occurring and some are consequences of artificial malfunctioning. In social sciences study we should clearly differentiate the issues and challenges according to the vulnerability as well as its possible solution. In environment politics or politics which shows concern over environmental issues and challenges. But the environment now has broadened its scope to many other issues and challenges which can become a threat to human life and security.

Paul R. Brass published an article titled 'Foucault Steals Political Science' in the journal *Annual Review of Political Science*. By 'stealing' Brass had in the mind in which power, government and governance themes traditionally understood as central to political science- have been approached in original ways by Michel Foucault and scholars working in the analytical space opened up by this influential French thinker. Its current popularity is indebted to Michel Foucault, who developed his understanding of biopolitics to study power relations in a way that did not privilege the state or sovereign models of power. But Foucault is less concerned with identifying the topography of power than analysing the techniques or mechanisms through which power is exercised, and the underlying strategies. Even though Foucault's indifference to nature and the environment is well documented (Darier 1999), biopolitics infuses many other concepts in critical environmental thought, such as governmentality (Lovbrand and Stripple), risk (Pellizzoni), vulnerability (Methmann and Oels) and security (Dalby). Looking back to past few decades, the language and analytics of governmentality has dispersed, become mixed with other approaches and gone off in many different directions (Rose, O' Malley and Ververde, 2006). The insistence on moving away from grand theories e.g. globalisation, modernisation, risk society and instead investigating practices through which we govern, and are governed, in our everyday lives. In 1978, Foucault, in his lectures launched the neologism 'governmentality' to describe a particular art of government that emerged in eighteenth century Europe and concerned the regulation and administration of life at the level of populations.

According to him, 'to govern' is 'to shape the field of possible action of others. The different spatial and historical engagements with Foucault's governmentality concept have helped us to understand 'how natures and bodily behaviours are drawn into existence through generation of knowledge, and why such practices should be theorised as exercises of power. Now a new concept of governmentality is derived from Foucault's concept known as Green Governmentality coined by Rutherford (1999) and Luke (1995b, 1999b) to denote a particular art of government tied to the rise of modern environmentalism in the 1960s and 1970s.

2. Origin and Ancient Beliefs of the Brahmaputra River

According to Tibetan tradition, the source of Brahmaputra lies not in the Kubi glaciers, as claimed by Sven Hedin, but in Chemayungdung glaciers. While locating the sources of the Indus and the Sutlej, Sven Hedin refers to all the Tibetan traditions at his disposal in support of his findings. When the Question of the source of the Brahmaputra comes in, he does not give any authority but that of a voyage Quotations from the 'Elements of Hydrography', by the Chinese Professor Chi Chao Nan, which runs thus: "Langchen-kabab lies southeast of Kailas. On the east of this mountain stands the Tamchok-kabab mountain which is the source of Tamchok-kabab or the Brahmaputra". Some writers define the source of the river as the point of its course that is most remote from its mouth. Colonel George Strahan has shown that if this definition be applied to the Ganges, its source will not be Himalayan at all but will be near Mhow in Central India at the head of Chambal.' As noted by Colonel Ryder in 1904, of the three headwaters of the Brahmaputra, the Kubi, the Chemayungdung and the Mayum Chu, the Kubi is by far the most biggest, and as such its source in the Kubi glaciers should be regarded as the source of the Brahmaputra if the quantity of the water is taken into considerations. The source of origin may be claimed differently by many scholars, but it is confirmed that it is a trans-boundary river Passing through different nation states and which carries a big burden of survival, means of livelihood for millions of people. Its cleanliness, water quality and its significance plays a very important role in human lives since time immemorial.

3. Importance of Brahmaputra River

Mythical Stories and Historical importance: A history of Assam (1905), that 'The Soil of Brahmaputra valley is fertile, but its climate is damp and relaxing, so that while people enjoy great material prosperity, there is a strong tendency towards physical and moral deterioration. All societies emerge from jungles and forests; and rivers are the base of civilizations. Whether in early times or in the Middle Ages, in the west or in the east. States in the Brahmaputra valley too emerged from these two resources, with the great river system and jungles grown on all around its bank. This process of introduction of Ahom vocabulary to name the natural resources including the river was the beginning of a process of cultural and social integration in early medieval Assam. The Brahmaputras with its numerous tributaries, the forests on both north and south, the hillocks scattered here and there were major considerations in the formation of Ahom military force. It is recorded that Namrup in the extreme south-east was selected as a place of exile of the criminals and shelter of fugitive kings because of its thickly forested, wildlife and damp climates. Rivers islands were selected for military camps and stations of warfare. It was in the foothill areas and the forests all around the guerilla tactics of warfare developed. It is because of the numerous rivers and rivulets that the Ahom naval force became the foremost and there was a department even to look after the civil communication system. It was under this department that boat making factories (naosali) were running for both military and civil purposes. And such military forts were built normally on the banks of the Brahmaputra while the route was ordinarily used by the foreigners to invade the state. The river system, therefore, has formed the base of Assam's early civilization due to which people here use to worship them in various iconographic or other forms.

International Importance: Brahmaputra river basin is one of the most vulnerable ideas in the world subject to combined effects of glacier melt, extreme monsoon rainfall and sea level rise. Water is emerging as a new possible irritant between China and India. For India, the water of Brahmaputra constitutes a major lifeline for people of Tibet and North eastern states.

The building of dams and diversion projects forward. The requirement of freshwater as the pollution grows and population rise has forced China to have Tsangpo-Brahmaputra River River Project. The key challenge for sustainable management of the basin is conflict between two Asian giants. Conflict is frightening over sustained growth in water and energy demand, interference with natural river flows from Dams, inter-basin water transfers and water diversions. The basin is characterised by large seasonal fluctuations in water availability due to the very wet monsoon and the extremely dry winter. The curious amalgam of burgeoning population, rapid economic growth and emphasis on hydropower. The planned hydropower and water diversion projects, combined with mounting water security concerns have a greater impact on relations between these two countries. The diversion of water heavily causes environmental devastation of India's north eastern plains. China has used water as a political weapon against India. The Chinese projects constitute an imminent threat to India's water security. The management of water through river projects was not water storage, but deadly flash floods. Nutrient rich sediments that enrich the soil of these regions would be held back in the reservoir instead of reaching the river's delta. A water war could ensue (Arpi 2003), China is a country which is not interested in addressing the water issue faced by india. It hardly considers the ecology and economic future of the North Eastern States of India. China's discrete water utilisation and water committal approaches are equally provocative. China's thirst for water is so intense that it will for water is so sensitive leave other lower riparian states thirsty, according to analysts (Sinha, 2012)

Means of transport and Commercial area: Observation of the Brahmaputra River from Guwahati port, lots of people are dependent on Brahmaputra for everyday life going to different parts of the cities via waterways. It also has the two famous temples of Kamkhya and Umananda which attracts lots of people coming for divine visit and pilgrimage. It is not just a river but it is a main source of means of transport, communication, many people are dependent on small business-like sellingb communication, many people are dependent on small business-like selling fruits, coconuts, maize, paan, flower garlands, worshipping items in the small islands, and tons of people pass by every day for different purpose such as offices, tourists, sightseeing, holidaying or recreational purposes and

other personal purposes transportation, business purpose, etc. It has a great role in moulding and shaping the development of the city. The importance of Brahmaputra can't be neglected for overall citizens.

4. Environmental Issues in Brahmaputra

Constructions of Dams, Bridges and Pollution:

The people of the Brahmaputra valley may not have any choice but to learn to live with the risks of mega dams. No one ever asked them if they are willing to exchange the hazards of natural disaster for the risks of modern industrialism. Yet what India's technocratic establishment has concluded is that 'acceptable risks' will become an inescapable part of their lives -atleast for those who are living in their existing village and make a living. They will have to find resources within them- culturally and psychologically -to deal with those risks. Their old ways of dealing pre-industrial hazards will not do. 'No matter how large and devastating as Ulrich Beck Reminds, they were strokes of fate' raining down on mankind from outside and attributable to other gods, demons or nature.

Political economy of Hydropower in the Eastern Himalayas (Sanjib Baruah), The large dams being built on the rivers of the eastern Himalayas have become highly controversial. The hydropower that Northeast India expected to produce is meant to provide entirely elsewhere. That these dams will be exclusively hydropower and not multipurpose dams and that there will be great evenness in the distribution of potential gains and losses- and of vulnerability to risks - accounts for a serious legitimacy deficit in India's ambitious hydropower development plans in the region. The enclosing of water commons- the inevitable outcome of these dams- will have a devastating impact on the lives of millions, especially the rural poor who depend on the waterways for their lives in multiple ways for their living. What is occurring in the Brahmaputra Valley today is resistance by riverine people against powerful elites bent on pursuing a strategy of accumulation by dispossession, and trying to turn their rivers into free fuel for hydropower plants, in utter disregard of the impact.

Prominent experts on water resources- some of them known for their staunch support of large dams- have expressed astonishment at the government of India's political incapacity to put in place a statutory body that has the power, autonomy and professional competence to focus on the development of the Brahmaputra River basin region as a whole. Among them is John Briscoe, whom Critics call the WorldBank's 'main large dam crusader' (Bosshard 2008). Indeed, in the debate on the lower Subansiri project, the NHPC itself cites his book "India's Water Economy": Bracing for a Turbulent Future to make the argument that the expert group's study ignores studies showing the positive impacts of dams' (NHPC 2010a:43). Moreover, it has become increasingly apparent that dam protests in future will face more than intellectual arguments on the other sides of the barricades. They will have to contend with the coercive apparatus of the state as well. However, the discourse of environmentalism is of somewhat limited use when it comes to understanding and mobilising public opinion on - the impact of large dams in 'developing' countries. The vocabulary of environmentalism may circulate globally but it does not have the same political resonance among the general public in all parts of the world. While the laws of many countries, including India, require some Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) for major developmental projects, those legislations are not the result of domestic political pressures.

5. The Impact of Environmental issues on Brahmaputra

The Indian Constitution provides all the citizens the right to life under art. 21 which includes a clean and healthy environment. 'Right to life' is the most important right since times immemorial. We have derived other rights such as Right to Freedom, Right to Equality from Right to Life. But the most important thing we need to know is what are certain rights that are included in Right to Life. Here comes the necessities of Green Governmentality in Brahmaputra when the question of polluting and environmental issues are concerned. Pollution creates different health issues, people who visit for a while and leave may have lesser impact on the particular environmental issues but what about those economically marginalised populations who are working and spending the whole day for their survival?

Considering their health hygiene their right to life may even be a threat. The most important apex body of international organisation that defines Human Rights i.e., UNHRC declares certain rights under Right to Life that includes a healthy environment for all. What does this imply? It is necessary that the government should be responsible and take the initiative to make certain arrangements in order to fulfil the desired necessity, but it is also a duty of the people to understand that there are certain issues in which there is necessity of collective response or collective action. In such times we should know who is the real enemy of humans and should not hesitate to raise our voice for such concern of mankind, as it will not affect a particular section of the society, race, caste, gender or identity. Every other human issue will be overlooked when these issues lack collective concern and will become the real enemy of humans. At such times, we need to know the real enemy and the real concern, that is why we need to draw an imaginary line of understanding between needs and desire. Any environmental movement or environmental activists shouts or claims for such issues as a threat to life and a necessary action should be taken up by the government and safeguard it since it is a fundamental right provided by the constitution of India to the citizens. Violating such issues means challenging the fundamental rights of the citizen. Right to Environment can be challenged and are also challenged in different states too. In *Subhash Kumar v. Bihar AIR 1991 SC 420* the Apex court has held that enjoyment of a pollution free environment is included in the right to life under Art. 21. In *A.P Pollution control Board v. M.V Nayudu AIR 1999 SC812* the Supreme Court has made very valuable suggestions for improvement of adjudicatory machinery under the various environmental laws. The main burden of these suggestions is that in all environmental courts, tribunals and appellate authorities, there should be judge of rank of High Court or a supreme Court judge, sitting or retired, and a scientist or a group of scientists of high ranking and experience so as to help a proper and a fair adjudication of disputes relating environment and pollution. Further, a provision ought to be made for an appeal to the Supreme Court. The Present-day system of adjudication is not satisfactory. The scientific and technological issues arising in environmental matters are extremely complex, and therefore, there is a need for technical persons well versed in environmental laws to handle these issues.

Likewise, environmental issues can be made aware and protected legally through a court of justice under art. 21. But awareness, protection and governmental policies programmes and policies can't be effective without the cooperation of the people. Green Governmentality includes a common initiative of the government and locals to cooperate and move hand in hand thus providing transparency of the governmental policies, making the most effective clean city with quality lifestyle and healthier society. Such an important river and as big as Brahmaputra's pollution can't be taken as simply as a local issue. The first to face the impact of pollution is obviously the local people but its pollution will impact the whole globe since its tributaries and the final sedimentation is in Bay of Bengal. The valley areas and marginalised population's role in safeguarding the river can be of great significance for the globe.

Some major concerns regarding environmental issues which are observed are as follows:

- Litterings of plastic bottles and other residues of the passerby and those in the area on the riverside which are not properly dump can bring many diseases, pollute the water.
- Marine pollution can also increase BOD (biological oxygen demand), Aquatic floras and faunas available from the river or fishes which are contaminated with poisonous substance dissolve in the river water.
- The dumping of waste in the open space of the river bank may also cause many waters borne diseases as well as can pollute the air.
- The construction of dams and bridges are going to add more chemical composition in the water which can give certain compromises to water purity.

6. Measures that can be taken up by understanding Green Governmentality

Suggestions or Measures to Minimise the Risk of Vulnerability

Some suggestions regarding actions that can be taken up in Brahmaputra valley as a part of green governmentality are:

- The government can provide certain schemes, policies or programs and pay on a daily basis such as a job card for cleaning the river bank where there is certain littering by tourists or passerby or those who indulge in commercial purposes.
- For safety purpose they can plan safeguard equipment's on the river banks in case of floods and high tides.
- Special forces specialised in disaster management should be 24/7 on duty.
- Well established commercial ticket counter or shops with proper disposal should be maintained.
- The condition of the boats can be improved and make a wider scope for means of transportation with varied fares according to the choice and strictly warn the passengers not to pollute the water and give strict rules such as penalty fee can be paid if not abide by the laws.
- A nearby paramedical team may be arranged as there may be emergencies for the people as it's a busy river carrying thousands of lives every now and then.
- A very strong cooperation between the local people and governmental institutions can be build up to minimise the risk of environmental issues by making people aware of such issues.
- A regular field trips of students to study, analyse and make slogans like cleaning Brahmaputra can be raised.
- Regular checking of the water level and polluting levels.
- Identifying the main Pollutants.
- Preventing littering of plastics bottles or any pollutants in riverbanks.
- Providing a better healthy lifestyle and healthy habits for marginalised sections of the society.
- Better quality foods and make them aware of the good food habits and good food for better survival.
- Regular health check-up for free such as medical camps distributing free health benefits.

7. Conclusion

Now the whole global issues and concern shown by the UN is also focused on restoring the earth. But the question is what are the things or what should we restore? The answer is given by certain policies and programmes initiated and focused by the UN. Right now, the main focus of the UN is to restore the earth's resources such as water, biodiversity and its natural resources and the other main concern of the UN is maintaining climate change.

Some notable actions initiated by the UN are the UN Water Conference, 2023, suggesting accelerating change to solve the water and sanitation crisis. The World Seagrass Day marking the first official UN-recognized World Seagrass Day with a deep dive into the global challenges of seagrass conservation. But despite many awareness and schemes as well as people showing concern on such issues, the number of people showing concern is very low in proportion as compared to the whole global mass. So, we can say that the awareness and concern have not reached the target for the necessary level of awareness at this very rate of destruction happening in the environment. The last thing we could suggest to do is bring more concern and aware the mass on the urgency to global crisis focused by UN and cooperation and teaming up with science and technology with the social sciences and move on a common goal as it can bring about a huge impact on human lives and human survival within a few decades. Worst scenario of a global crisis that can happen or the next world war may be the race or struggle of resource accumulation and its issues. The nations may fight for natural resources, drinking water, clean air rather than other issues such as identity crisis or nuclear power or any other fights of rights or economic development. Once the basic needs are not met i.e., air, water and food, the people will show more and more crimes, hatred and selfish nature among themselves and create an imbalance power, war like situation in every nation, within nations or all the advancement knowledge or identity conflicts may become meaningless and the political concern alone cannot bring about peaceful environment as well as the chaos within the nations may become another great war in the near future.

So, who will be responsible for such an act of polluting the environment?

Who will be the one to blame - the government or the local people or the tourist? It can be blamed to all and all are responsible for it. But the impact of such blame will be faced greatly or mostly by the economically marginalised sections depending directly for livelihood on it. Not only health but also many other natural disasters such as floods, high and strong tides, many of the people are also dependent on such big rivers for fishes and other aquatic floras and faunas. Thus, a green governmentality in which a collective action of both the government and locals considering the importance of environmental issues are necessary. The concept of Green Governmentality is less aware to the people and its importance in this modern society where the environmental issues have become a big political issue neglected by many. Understanding the environmental issues as well as maintaining the development process is not always contradictory. If we look for a better human society with growth and development with quality life we need to aware of green governmentality as such as possible as we can because our society lacks a lot of awareness regarding the importance of environmental crisis and its consequences, because they are poor and sacrifice the health benefits and its hazardous impact on the surrounding just to fill their stomach at the end of the day. But filling the stomach is necessary if the food we eat is not safe and may shorten the life span of humans. Do humans survive to eat or are we eating for survival? People are very much aware of art 21 i.e., Right to life, but consider less on what is under the provisions of right to life. What are the provisions included under this.

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