

Boats, Sands and Jutes: Survivals in the Chars of Brahmaputra River in Assam, India

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Friday, April 21, 12 -1 pm

537 Heller Hall (ICGC)

Live Stream Available @www.icgc.umn.edu

Chars are sand and silt islands that dot the Brahmaputra River flowing across the Northeast Indian state of Assam. Although chars apparently are island spaces in the river, these often do not fit in to the regular definition of islands because of its essentially short-lived character. Its sheer susceptibilities to the fierce monsoonal floods in the region give it a peculiar definition of anxious readiness to frequent submergences and occasional reappearances over the body of the river. Chars are inhabited by working-class Bengali Muslim populations, who had migrated from the East Bengal region (the present state of Bangladesh) to Assam during British colonial times in India. Living in the riverine chars is often identified as a constant play between death and survival against the environmental precarities with an acute dearth of resources. The purpose of this talk is to get ourselves introduced to this landscape, which is hardly present in the global order of spaces in times of climate change conversations. By focusing on the human engagement prospects with three major and elemental presences in the chars – the boat, the sand and the jute plant – this talk relies on subjective reflections on non-human embodiments, especially of water and land, and combines it with literary materials to seek out alternate realms of survival thinking in times of planetary disasters.

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Nepalpara Char, Assam
Photo Credit: Dhriyoti Kalita

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