



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY GUWAHATI  
SHORT ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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The Kaziranga National Park (KNP) is considered a remarkable success in wildlife conservation history. In the last one hundred years, the Greater One-horned Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) population revived from its near-extinction. The success is often credited to the bureaucratic and technocratic efforts to create wildlife habitats free of human intrusion.

This work tries to offer an environmental and agrarian explanation for the KNP's present. It situates the KNP in the agrarian and ecological context of the floodplains. The floodplain grassland is the rhino's prime habitat. However, in the early twentieth century, the fluid floodplains standing at the periphery of the Brahmaputra Valley's agrarian core were the sites of grazing, fishing, hunting, and forest produce collection. The park officials and conservationists over the twentieth century worked to free it from these connections. However, floodplains' role as the absorber of the agrarian core's disturbances like large livestock herd and wildlife meant that livestock grazing had a long presence around the park. The colonial government accommodated limited grazing in the sanctuary. Such reconciliatory measure was crucial in enlisting peasants' and graziers' support to revive the rhino population during the 1920s to 1950s. Ecological changes, bureaucratic convenience, and electoral politics kept these activities alive in the park until the 1960s. Renegotiating the linkages in the wider agrarian milieu was a slow process, and made the first steps when the imagination about the rhino entered Assam's cultural politics. KNP's example suggests that though 1970s is considered to be the decade of ecological restoration in India, the previous two decades after independence were not conversationally empty.

Culturally informed science and law united with regional cultural politics in cutting off the park from its agrarian connections. The process resulted into a shift from a continuum to sharp edge at the park's boundary. It is perhaps this success that science and law dominate the contemporary wildlife conservation debates. This work resituates the protected areas like the KNP in their agrarian milieu to explain their making. The agrarian history illuminates several conflicts and conservation challenges that impinge the park today.