



Fast fashion, characterized by rapid production cycles, mass consumption, and disposable clothing, has severe environmental consequences. While this global industry has economic benefits, its environmental toll is alarming, particularly in regions like Assam, where its impact is felt in pollution, waste generation, and resource depletion. This essay explores the environmental costs of fast fashion in Assam, providing examples from the state to illustrate the challenges it poses.

Water Pollution and Textile Dyeing

One of the most significant environmental impacts of fast fashion is water pollution. Textile manufacturing involves extensive use of chemicals and dyes, which often find their way into water bodies. In Assam, the textile dyeing industry, including both large-scale factories and small-scale traditional handloom sectors, has led to contamination of rivers like the Bharalu and Kolong. Chemical-laden wastewater, if not treated properly, seeps into the Brahmaputra River, affecting aquatic life and drinking water sources.



Waste Generation and Landfills

Fast fashion promotes frequent clothing disposal, leading to massive textile waste. Many urban centers in Assam, such as Guwahati and Dibrugarh, struggle with unmanaged waste due to increasing consumption of cheap, synthetic garments. Unlike traditional Assamese handloom fabrics such as Muga and Eri silk, which are biodegradable and durable, synthetic fast fashion items contribute significantly to non-biodegradable waste. These discarded clothes end up in landfills or are burned, releasing harmful toxins into the air.

Exploitation of Natural Resources

The demand for raw materials in the fast fashion industry has led to over-extraction of natural resources. Assam, known for its rich biodiversity and forest cover, faces deforestation due to the expansion of cotton cultivation and fabric production. Additionally, water-intensive cotton farming depletes groundwater resources, creating stress for local communities that rely on rivers and underground reservoirs for agriculture and daily use.



Impact on Traditional Handloom Industry

Fast fashion's rise has also threatened Assam's traditional handloom industry, which is an eco-friendly alternative. The state has a deep-rooted weaving culture, especially among the Assamese communities producing Muga, Eri, and Paat silk. However, mass-produced synthetic clothing has reduced demand for handloom products, leading to declining livelihoods for artisans. This shift discourages sustainable fashion practices that have been integral to Assam's cultural and environmental balance.

Microplastic Pollution from Synthetic Fibers

Fast fashion largely depends on synthetic fabrics like polyester, which shed microplastics when washed. These tiny particles enter Assam's rivers and water systems, harming aquatic ecosystems. The Brahmaputra and its tributaries, which serve as lifelines for the region, are increasingly polluted by microplastics, posing threats to both marine biodiversity and human health.



The Need for Sustainable Alternatives

To mitigate the environmental costs of fast fashion, Assam must promote sustainable clothing alternatives. Encouraging the use of traditional handloom fabrics, implementing strict pollution control measures for textile industries, and raising awareness about the environmental impact of synthetic clothing are crucial steps. Organizations and entrepreneurs in Assam have started promoting ethical fashion by reviving traditional weaving practices and advocating for eco-friendly dyes and fabrics.

Conclusion

The environmental cost of fast fashion is undeniable, and Assam is no exception to its negative impacts. Water pollution, waste accumulation, resource depletion, and threats to traditional handloom industries highlight the urgent need for sustainable fashion choices. By embracing eco-friendly alternatives and supporting local artisans, Assam can combat the adverse effects of fast fashion while preserving its rich textile heritage and natural environment.