Chapter-3

Politics of Environment

3.1 Introduction:

As discussed in the previous chapters the global consciousness for the protection of environment has become a serious topic for debate and discussion in both international and national media. With time the business of environmental consciousness has become more and more politicized. It has today become a dominant ideology in the process of policy formation for the government. Two views have contributed a lot in the process of ideology formation: one is utopian and the other is dystopian. The reduction of non-renewable energy, the encouragement to the industrial economy to adopt "eco-friendly" and "environment friendly" practices, reduction in the use of toxic chemicals are inherent characteristics of the utopian view. On the other hand, the dystopian view imagines a world where environmental problems can lead to a difficult phase for mankind in general. The dystopian vision has portrayed a doomed future where the world will be divided between the people who can access food and other life-supporting resources and those who cannot access the basic needs of human life. "The world will be divided increasingly between those who can afford to access food, water, and good weather under the conditions of increasing weather volatility, and those who cannot. Major floods, drought, hurricanes, and food shortages will kill millions of poor people, and disease caused by these disruptions as well as increasing pests and viruses will devastate those who cannot protect themselves or gain access to medical care" (Sturgeon 2009, 4). Both these views have contributed a lot in making news through media.

Hence the consequences of environmental degradation seem to be of paramount concern globally. It is also reflected in various public discourses throughout the world. These discourses encourage the process of growth of various streams of environmentalism around the globe. It has also impacted our political and economic systems. People began to question the dominant development philosophy. Increased privatization in the world economy has shaken the earth's durability which is the real producer of life.

Hence the rights of the natural world have got importance within the philosophy of environmentalism. "The mainstreaming of environmentalism has resulted in a disjunction between the roles of addresser and speaker. The media are important speakers, and their role has attracted considerable attention" (Dyer & Dyer 1990, Gerbig 2000, Hansen 1996, Rissel & Douglas1993, Mühlhäusler and Peace 2006, 460).

3.2 Representation of Environmental Threats in the Media

Representation is one of the key issues in Cultural Studies. "Representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people" (Hall 1997, 15). According to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary there are two meanings of representation.

(a)   To represent something is to describe or depict it, to call it up in the mind by description or portrayal or imagination; to place a likeness of it before us in our mind or in the senses

(b)   To represent also the means to symbolize, stand for, to be a specimen of, or to substitute for

There are three approaches towards representation: the reflective, the intentional, and the constructionist. According to the reflective approach, meaning always resides in the object, person, idea or event in the real world. The function of the language is like a mirror which will reflect the true meaning already existing in the world. The intentional approach offers an opposite view. According to this approach the meaning of the word depends upon the author's intention. What the author wants to mean is the actual meaning of the word. "It holds that it is the speaker, the author, who imposes his or her unique meaning on the world through language" (Hall 1997, 25).   The third approach is the constructionist one. According to this approach "neither things in themselves nor the individual users of language can fix meaning in language" (Hall 1997, 25). This approach argues that "we must not confuse the material, where things and people exist, and the symbolic practices and processes through which representation, meaning and language operate. Constructivists do not deny the existence of the material world. However, it is not the material world which conveys meaning……it is social

actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful and to communicate about that world meaningfully to others" (Hall 1997, 25).

Media plays an important role in speaking "on behalf" of the environment. Media can communicate about the natural world in a way which helps in shaping their perception of masses towards the environment. The environmental problems do not 'speak' by themselves. They become problems or issues when successful claims makers actively construct their images. "Central to the social construction of environmental issues and problems is the idea that these do not rise and fall according to some fixed, asocial, self-evident set of criteria. Rather, their progress varies in direct response to successful 'claims-making' by a cast of social actors that includes scientists, industrialists, politicians, civil servants, journalists and environmental activists" (Hannigan 1995, 2006,63). They 'become' social problems through the use of verbal and visual imagery. Various perspectives construct an environmental condition as a "real" threat. Thus, the construction of the environment as a social issue can be seen essentially as a rhetorical achievement. Media coverage of a particular environmental problem is crucial to introduce the problem into public discourse. While playing an important role in making news of environmental problems, the media plays a major role in articulating and perpetuating environmental discourses among the masses.

The role of the media in the process of construction of social reality is very important. "The construction of a problem as a 'social problem' is […] largely a rhetorical or discursive achievement, the enactment of which is perpetrated by claims-makers" and it "takes place in certain settings or public arenas, and proceeds through a number of phases" (Hansen 2010, 28). By using the type of rhetoric e.g. rhetoric of loss, rhetoric of calamity, rhetoric of unreason, and the type of metaphor, cultural texts in general and media texts in particular try to articulate a particular issue. With reference to the environment, this, for instance, can include popular images of deep-seated public fears which are unpredictable and highly devastating. According to Hansen, "the media and media coverage of environmental issues are best conceived of as a –continuously changing- cultural reservoir of images, meanings and definitions, on which different publics will

draw for the purpose of articulating, making sense of, and understanding environmental problems and the politics of environmental issues" (Hansen 2010,182).

As said earlier, environmental issues cannot speak for themselves. They are socially constructed as issues of importance; the meaning that is attached to the environment changes over time and space. Media plays a significant role in this by promoting these issues for public and political concern. The use of various rhetorical idioms, motifs, claims making style, frames, and settings can help to construct an environmental problem as a social problem. Hence, various terms such as 'the environment', 'environmental', 'climate change', 'global warming', 'green peace', 'greenhouse effect', 'acid rain', 'deforestation', 'soil erosion', 'pollution', 'nuclear winter', 'organic food',' toxic waste', 'eco-friendly', 'flood' all constitute a part of influential public discourse. These have become broader issues or problems of public and political concern. Since the emergence of the environmental movement of the 1960s, various environmental issues have become social problems. They have become a part of political agenda. Media texts present a particular event through language and visual representation. Hence the analysis of these texts will inform the multiple and complex reality of the problem. This chapter will also examine how realities are constructed at the intersection of environmental and other kinds of discourses.

According to the constructionist perspective (Hall 1997, 25) (which looks at social problems from a different perspective) problems do not simply exist by themselves in some objective universe. They become social problems when someone draws public attention to them. In contrast, there is a materiality of the environment as manifested in environmental catastrophes, the destruction wrought by which is really enormous. Flood, earthquake, tsunami, hurricane etc can be regarded as 'natural' when one takes into account the magnitude of the havoc that they can wreak. They are beyond human control and regarded as natural disasters.

However, even something as 'natural' as natural disasters can have different meanings for different people. Here an example can be cited from the history. The famous Gandhi- Tagore debate on Bihar's earthquake which Gandhi termed

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as god's intervention could be an appropriate example of this (Bhatacharya 1997). In the year 1934, on 15th June Bihar was shaken by a devastating earthquake and coincidentally at that period Gandhi was campaigning against the prevailing practice of untouchability. Mahatma Gandhi stated that the earthquake was a result of god's ire. It was the punishment inflicted upon the people of the region for the sinful practice of untouchability. Gandhi's view was challenged by Rabindranath Tagore. For Tagore an earthquake is a natural phenomenon that can be scientifically explained. The debate between Gandhi and Tagore was not merely a debate between 'rationality' and 'spirituality'. This debate was a reflection of the different meanings that are ascribed to the same natural phenomenon. Thus, environmental discourse is not a natural-given but the product of different ideological and belief systems.

"Conspicuous, intrusive and devastating as they may be, natural disasters – or for that matter, major unexpected or unforeseen accident related to man-made structures or processes- do not automatically 'mean' anything, that is, meaning has to be assigned to them or constructed around them. The 'meaning' of devastating floods may be "divine intervention/retribution', 'nature's revenge' or 'the inevitable results of climate change', but the process of assigning meaning to an event essentially requires the discursive 'work' of claims-makers" (Hansen 2010, 16). Since the environmental discourse is always embedded in the socio-political context, an analysis of the former can actually shed light on the latter.

This chapter will discuss the media representation of environmental issues, particularly in the context of Assam. Apart from this, the chapter also focuses on the formation of ecological subjectivity through school text books. To begin with, the researcher will trace a brief history of the environmental movement in India as well as in Assam.

3.3 Environmental Politics in India

According to the Hindu sacred books there is no happiness without trees. "…Hindus were the first environmentalists. A precociousness was manifest in their myths, folklore, and ritual practices, where gods played with animals, where humans attained salvation in the forest, and where lowly plant and insect species

were treated with reverence" (Guha 2010,2-3). It proves that India has a long tradition of environmentalism. From the Vedic periods the concern for environment is a significant presence in Indian philosophy.

In the year 1972 a UN conference on environment was held at Stockholm. In that conference the then Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, put forward her opinion that *poverty is the greatest polluter.* She said: "The rich look askance at our continuing poverty and on the other hand they warn against our methods. We do not wish to impoverish the environment any further and yet we cannot for a moment forget the grim poverty of large numbers of people. Are not poverty and need the greatest polluters? The environment cannot be improved in conditions of poverty. Nor can poverty be eradicated without the use of science and technology" (Quoted in Rangarajan 2007, xviii). This famous slogan *garibi hatao* by Indira Gandhi shaped the development process of India. The development model simply followed the path showed by capitalists. At the same time, environmental crises of different types had already become visible. These degradations were seriously realized at various levels. This urged modern environmentalism to be critical about the process of development adopted by the Indian State. "As the Indian environmental movement saw it, the post-colonial rulers had failed to make a break with the colonial model of development, as it continued to push forward the modern capitalist agenda that was responsible for the penury of the masses in general and marginalized people in particular. They attributed the degradation of the environment to the development of large industry and its mode of resource use in the era of modern development" (Prasad 2004, 12).

However the development of modern environmentalism in India bears another history:

> In the mid-1970s, when environmentalism as an organized movement emerged in contemporary India, the struggle was against specific government policies and projects. In less than two decades, environmental advocacy has matured swiftly from protest against environmental damage to questions about the character and course of development. By the time of the 1992 Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro, environmental issues were up front on the

international stage, and environmental politics in India had taken firm root. And yet, despite the flurry of programmes and activities, Indian environmentalism continues to be limited to stopping particular projects, refining environmental regulations and generating a new ecological vocabulary (Krishna 1996, 7).

"The environment in colonial and post-colonial India has been widely explored as a site of both material and discursive conflict, often emblematic of broader social and political struggles" (Mawdsley 2004, 79). The environmental movement in India has always been connected to social movements. "Indian environmental politics has been vividly and variously defined as "environmentalism of the poor", "indigenous environmentalism", "middle-class environmentalism", "elite environmentalism", " eco-feminism", "red and green", " green and saffron" and much more, revealing its diversity and dynamics" (Sharma 2012, 46). It is true that the Indian environmental movement possesses different colours. It has been deeply influenced by long cherished traditions of Indian culture.

Guha identifies three strands in the Indian environmental movement. They are the Crusading Gandhian, Appropriate Technology and Ecological Marxists (Guha 1988, 2579). According to Guha, "The conflicts which these movements symbolize are not (as in the western case) about 'productive' versus 'protective' uses of the environment, but about alternate productive uses (1988, 2579).

It is interesting to note that many thinkers of modern India champion the idea of protecting the environment. Gandhi has been regarded as the patron saint of Indian Environmentalism. Gandhi was the chief exponent of *ahimsa.* He was an advocate for alternative development. "… [T]he environmentalists today do not merely claim that they are following the example of Gandhi; they go on to argue that the Mahatma himself foresaw the ecological crisis of modern industrial society" (Sharma 2003,4). Gandhi criticized the modern industrialization process which destroys the village ecology. According to him the natural resources of the village or the forest areas are utilized by the industrial elites and it has deprived a large number of people from rural areas and tribal communities. Gandhi was not a strict ecologist, but his philosophy and way of living gave room to the thinkers of the later years to analyze him as a visionary environmentalist.

The ecological politics of India possesses a unique place in the environmental history of South East Asia. In this context Guha's views are worth mentioning. According to him, "…third world environmentalism is qualitatively different, in its origins and emphases, from its Western counterpart. One is an environmentalism of survival and subsistence; the other of access to a clean and beautiful environment for the enhancement of the 'quality of life'" (1988, 2578). Plurality of perspective is always reflected in the dogmas of Indian environmentalism. This is because of the Indian social structure which is complex. Class, caste and gender issues inform environmentalism in India. Caste has become an important factor in defining environmentalism in India. The concept of caste thrives on a politics of inclusion/exclusion and of purity/impurity. The Dalit perspective on Environmentalism has made significant interventions in the Indian environmental movement. In recent years intellectuals have started to question contemporary environmentalism in India because of its inability to accommodate the Dalits. "If we are able to locate Indian environmental politics through the eyes and actions of dalits and their various movements in different parts of the country, we may be able to glean a new ecological universe, a visible dalit environmental public space, which is often outside the dominant discursive frame, but is nonetheless embedded in dalit ecological understandings" (Sharma 2012, 51). It is true that the position of dalits in Indian environmentalism is often marginalized. Many times it is discussed with the other group of people for instance; marginal, poor, tribal etc.

The Chipko movement was the first environmental movement of India where the common people participated in an environmental cause. It has opened up new vistas of modern environmentalism in India. The Chipko movement began with the vision to protect the trees of the Indian Himalayas from industrialist exploitation. This movement relied heavily on Gandhian way of protest, including *satyagraha*. Likewise the activists of other movements such as the 'Apiko Movement' or 'Save the Narmada Movement' (Narmada Bachao Andolon) have adopted the Gandhian ideology in staging protests against industrialization. Apart from this, it can be said that Chipko altered the order of environmental struggle in India. "Indian Environmentalism was given an impetus

in the latter part of the 1970s by movements directed to specific ends, notably the Chipko agitation to stop contact-felling in the western Himalaya, the crusade against the dam in Silent Valley, and the campaign to protect the Taj Mahal from pollution. The Chipko movement in particular went beyond the immediate goal of saving trees to confront the complex interlinkages between development and the environment; it gave environmentalists a 'human face', because this was a struggle involving poor rural people, not just scientists and educated city-dwellers" (Krishna 1996, 33).

The present debate on environmentalism in India is arguing about the conflict of resource use. The contemporary philosophy supports an egalitarian use of natural resources. "Conflicts over forests and water, in particular, between a subsistence-oriented urban-industrial sector, provide the material backdrop to these debates" (Guha 1992, 57). Equity and justice are the important pre-requisites of the Indian environmental movement. This stream of environmentalism is following the Gandhian way of mass mobilization.

The involvement of the middle class in the various environmental debates is another significant point while talking about the environmental politics of India. The middle class constitutes a large amount of India's population. They are the most active group in institutionalizing various environmental issues. They used to take active part in raising various environmental problems in the public front. In case of India the middle class population is the leading figure in various social movements. The mainstream environmental discourses have often been led by them. Of course those social movements are fought for the cause of welfare of the group of subalterns. I am using the word subaltern to denote those groups who are politically termed as adivasis, tribal, indigenous and economically classified as "poor". The middle class is the larger section of the society and their consumption and waste production is huge. They take active part in media, politics, the legal system and other different areas of knowledge dissemination.

Thus Indian environmentalism is not homogeneous by nature. Many ideological trends have directed the course of environmental politics in India. "Indian environmentalism now incorporates a variety of philosophical approaches and

multifarious points of view. Environmentalists may be Gandhians, Marxists, conservatives, socialists, radicals, liberals, democrats, humanists and so on, or any combination of these. From within, the environmental movement is criss-crossed with contradictions; from the outside it often appears to be ideologically homogeneous" (Krishna 1996, 35).

3.3.1 Media and Environment in the Indian Context

Since India's independence the print media has been playing a pivotal role in highlighting the environment as an issue. But the significant point is that the environment is always incorporated within other social discourses. In India it is always mixed up with other political issues. The newspaper *Times of India* used to publish a weekly column on environment. Other newspapers like *The Hindu, Hindustan Times or Indian Express* also regularly publish news on the environment. In India environmental issues are generally addressed in relation to other issues related to governance, health, legal, science etc. These newspapers address the event specific environmental issues most of the times. "… [I]n the 1980s Indian Greens began receiving massive (and mostly positive) media attention. There was a veritable flood of reportage on environmental issues, and in most languages of the English Schedule. Of those who wrote in English, the names of Anil Agarwal, Darril D' Monte, and Usha Rai come to mind. But superb work was also done by Raj Kumar Keswani and Shekhar Pathak in Hindi, and by Nagesh Hegde in Kannada" (Guha 2008). He further stated in the same column, "With this surge of media attention came a welcome if belated response from the government. In 1980 a new Department of the Environment was established. This was upgraded five years later into a full-fledged Ministry of Environment and Forests. State Governments followed by setting up environment ministries of their own" (Guha 2008).

"Down To Earth", started in 1992, is the only magazine in India which has been playing an important role in environmental history of India. It is published by the Centre for Science and Environment. It discusses the topics related to environment both from the national and local level. This magazine has been playing a pivotal role in addressing the various environmental issues in India

from the perspective of pure livelihood. It has been raising different issues of environment and issues related to it. Amongst these, the issues of sustainable development and environmental regeneration are prominent. It has been tying its level best to bring the important issues to the public space.

Besides print media, the radio as a popular apparatus plays an important role in the process of various discursive formations. It is cheap and common people can easily access this media. The radio covers the whole country. But it plays a very nominal role in the field of environment as there are not many programmes related to the environment. "The role of radio in creating environmental awareness cannot be considered an important one due to the fact that there are only very few regular environmental programs, although there is an instruction by Supreme Court for all media that programs on environment should be broadcast" (Goyal 2014,5). Hence, in 1998 the Indian National Network, All India Radio with an aim to address different environmental issues such as, water, deforestation, air and noise pollution and some other topics run a program "Yeh Kahan Aa Gaye Hum" (Where have we arrived?) of 52 episodes containing the story of a small village in which a factory is newly set up. It was designed as a strategy of communication meant for the purpose of creating awareness through education and entertainment. Its purpose was to educate and create consciousness among the masses/ audience. It was produced under the leadership of Mrs. Usha Bhasin with the help of the Central Pollution Control Board of India. It was broadcast through 31 radio stations in the seven Indian states of northern India where the majority speak Hindi. It has turned into a popular program due to its publicity through different genres of media. It addressed the environmental issues by entertaining people and trying to build a bridge with the listeners. It was an interactive programme which encouraged listeners to act accordingly. This programme can be an important example while talking about the role of radio in creating consciousness about the protection of environment.

In the post-satellite television era environmental imagination has got a new space. The advent of electronic media opened up new directions in the history of environmentalism in India. Media has played an important role in shaping the ideology within the environmental movement. The advent of television has

become an important tool in spreading knowledge as well as information among the masses. It was first started with the national channel of Doordarshan. Now there are various national as well as regional channels with different objectives as the satellite television has taken a prominent place during the 1990s. Introduction of liberal economy has encouraged the growth and development of free and paid services in the field of television service in India. There are several infotainment channels which have been playing a significant role in fostering environmentalism from the perspective of conservation, protection, consciousness and shaping the attitude of the people towards the environment. In comparison to other media forms, television is faring better in terms of giving greater space to environmental issues. Channels like National Geographic, Discovery Channel, and Animal Planet are broadcasting various programs on the natural world regularly. Doordarshan (state owned) has some regular programs on the environment. They are important sources of information.

Here the environment presents a speculative vision. Environmental images are constructed from the perspective of the spectators. Environment is constructed as the 'other'. It is the human beings who are to "take care" of the environment.

Apart from the cinema and documentary films, different genres of popular culture are useful tools to shape human perceptions about environment. These have been used to initiate environmentalism among the masses and making people conscious about the various environmental problems. Dominant ideology /philosophy which is fostered by these media help to constitute environmental subjects. Cinema is the most powerful medium to propagate any ideology through its imagery, rhetoric and symbolism.

Indian Cinema, particularly Bollywood, does not have a very rich tradition of environmental films. Environmental films are those films which are based on the stories of environment. Those films talk about the various issues of environment. Though the number is not very large, there are films on the environment and on conservation which have received high critical acclaim. In the year 1989, the directorate of film festival instituted one national award in the National Film Festival for the best film in the category of environment conservation/ preservation. Since its inception sixteen films have been awarded in different Indian languages. *Banani* was the first film in Assamese language directed by

Jahnu Baruah, the eminent film maker from Assam which was selected for the award. Other names in the list are *Cheluvi(Kannada), Debara Kadu(Kannada), Nirbachana(Oriya), Rape in the Virgin Forest (Bodo), Bhoomigeetha (Kannada), Malli (Tamil), Jalamarmaram (Malayalam),Oru Cheru Punchiri (Malayalam), Juye Poora Xoon (Assamese), Devrai (Marathi), Thhutturi (Kannada), Jianta Bhoota (Oriya), Bettada Jeeva (Kannada), Black Forest (Malayalam), Perariyathavar (Malayalam).* The significant point is that all the award winning films are made in regional languages. Satyajit Ray's *Ganasatru* is based on the issue of environmental degradation.

In India a number of documentary films have been made focusing on various environmental issues. Some of the storylines address the issue of loss of biodiversity by advocating conservation and some of these are event-specific such as disaster, natural calamity, pollution etc. Valmik Thapar's works are mainly based on conservation and various other issues related to tiger population in India. Mike Pandey's works are also based on different biodiversity related issues. His films on the issue are acclaimed both nationally and internationally. There exist a number of documentary films in India which have been made for the fulfillment of specific purpose.

Beside these, the advent of new media in the field of communication has provided a boost to the development of environmentalism. They have been playing a big role in providing information and in propagating knowledge among the masses. There are many websites, blogs, social networking sites which have been highlighting environmental issues. You Tube is one of the most popular social media sites. You Tube's role in presenting an environmental issue to the masses is appreciable. To explore environmental narrative in the Indian context the mass media plays significant role. Here I am using the term 'enviromentality' (Agarwal 2005) which is influenced by Foucault's governmentality. These media texts try to disseminate knowledge among the masses and spread the kind of governmentality to act according to the massage spread by them.

3.4 Environmental Politics in Assam

Indian environmental politics has different manifestations in different parts of the country. The politics of environment has its own dynamics in the context of

Assam and it is related to the socio-cultural realities of the times. The environmental politics of Assam can be broadly categorized into two distinct philosophical traditions. One of these emphasizes the preservation of rich biodiversity. Different Non-Governmental Organizations play an important role in forcing this ideology. The other stream advocates the rights of the community over forest land and resources to sustain their indigenous ways of living. They are urging for redistribution of land and forest area. It initiates encroachment in the forested land for agriculture and other business. But it is painful to observe that many a time it mainly benefits the business class.

The people of Assam advocated the conservation of nature from time immemorial. It is true that their way was not the same as the contemporary discourse of conservation. Different ethnic groups had their own narratives about the environment. They follow their own style of preserving or protecting the environment. The most important thing is that they have their own techniques to fight against various environmental calamities. Various folk beliefs concentrating on the environment exist in the memory of the common population. Hence, it can be asserted that the seeds of environmentalism were rooted in their tradition itself.

But we cannot compare it with the aims and ideology of the environmentalism that originated in the west. The ethnic communities practiced some conservation techniques for their own survival. They were not loaded with any kind of ideological imposition. In this context, Guha's ironical observation regarding Indian environmental philosophy is worth mentioning. "A cultivated interest in the protection of nature was thought possible only when the necessities of life could be taken for granted" (Guha 2010, 2). Assamese proverb like *Aakalo Nai Bharaalo Naai (*No abundance, no scarcity*)* reflects the bountiful resources as well as sustainable lifestyle prevailing here. But the important point to note is that we cannot compare the kind of environmentalism in the west with that of Assam. The ecological and political trajectories of Assam bear a separate identity in comparison to contemporary Western, and even, Indian Environmentalism in certain points.

Environmentalism in Assam cannot be discussed in isolation. It is always hidden behind other issues. Very often it has a latent connection with the various nationalist struggles. Assam has contributed to the development of another stream to Indian Environmentalism. To study about the nature of environmentalism in Assam it is essential to have a look at the historical background going back to the time of the British. The advent of the British (as discussed in the introductory chapter) to this part of the country changed the entire landscape. During the colonial period the forest and other natural resources started to become the part of both national and international economy. It is true that the conflicts over various natural resources were the common phenomena in the history. But the advent of British to this region generated a sense of fear among the indigenous communities of the land.

"By creating and bringing an absolute right of the state, apart from alienating the traditional rights of the people, the colonial state converted the forest into a commercial commodity" (Saikia 2011,391). This created conflict between the forests and the agrarian frontiers. The discovery of tea also contributed a lot in changing the ecology of Assam during this period. "From the mid- nineteenth century the British state nurtured an export-oriented tea enterprise as an essential part of the ideology of agrarian improvement that it enunciated for its Indian colony in general, and Assam in particular" (Sharma 2011, 4). The plantation of tea replaced the traditional modes of agriculture andit turned large parts of forest areas into tea gardens. On the other hand, the Western-educated native businessmen were regarded as the pioneers in bringing structural change in Assam. Jayeeta Sarma has termed them as the *new secular pilgrimage*. According to her, "The new pilgrimages and urban encounters formed an essential component within a larger set of historical changes: they involved making an imperial "garden" and accompanying it, creating momentous encounters with modernity for Assam and India through British Colonial rule"(Sharma 2011,1).

A section of local elites joined hands with the colonial masters with an intention of bringing about substantial changes in the agrarian set-up. Along with this, the process of migration also started. Colonial rulers promoted the process of migration from other parts of India for the purpose of recruiting them in the tea

garden. Along with them the population of some other immigrant communities from Rajasthan, Nepal, Sylhet, Calcutta, and East Bengal gradually increased. Thus, the establishment of the tea industry in Assam became a historic event in the social and environmental history of Assam. This process of migration has given birth to the situation of protest movement against the state in later years. Many issues have arisen as an effect of this process of migration that was initiated in the nineteenth century.

Apart from this the colonial state imposed taxes on cultivated land. Henceforth the colonial regime in Assam faced a series of peasant movements during the period 1836-94. These series of peasant movements had a deep impact in the history of Assam. It also paved the path for the development of another wave of environmentalism in Assam.

The peasant movements of Assam continued even after India's independence. The peasant struggle of Tengani, a village of Upper Assam is an example. The Doyang Tengani movement can be categorized as an environmental struggle for asserting the rights of the poor peasants over the natural resources, more specifically their land rights. Tengani is a village situated in Golaghat district of Upper Assam within the location of North Nambor Reserved Forest. Doyang Reserved Forest and Nagaland are situated alongside this area. "Officially described as peasant colonization scheme, Tengani was one of a number of villages established in Nambor during 1890. Since then, these forests have witnessed three different phases of immigration by cultivators in search of land. They first arrived in the early twentieth century as part of the colonization scheme, while the second wave dates from the 1950s, a period marked by intense activity on the part of left-led peasant organizations that encouraged the landless to occupy tea plantation and forest department property….The third phase of immigration took place during 1970 and 1980s, when landless peasants arrived without either the support or the encouragement from the government" (Saikia 2008, 44). In due course of time different political equations as well as various forest conservation discourses turned this migration to political debate over the years. It has resulted in the emergence of a peasant struggle with the involvement of different classes such as traders, moneylenders, poor peasants, tea planters,

NGOs, bureaucrats as well as the Government. It started as a struggle for land rights by the poor peasants in the forest area. Within a short period of time it turned into an environmental movement by addressing the larger question of ownership of natural resources.

In more recent years the struggle for land rights for the peasants has become more aggressive with the protesters identifying themselves as indigenous people. They have created alternative political idiom such as *indigeneity*. "For the people of the troubled north-east, citizenship both of India and of a state can provide an alternative political idiom to that of indigeneity and territoriality. The obvious advantage of multi-level citizenship is that it could define political communities in civic terms, and introduce a dynamic element of incorporating new members. It could make a decisive break from the notion of ethnic homelands that owes so much to the colonial propensity of fixing tribes to their supposedly natural habitats" (Baruah 2008,15). In a report published in the English daily, *Assam Tribune,* Krisak Mukti Sangram Samiti urged the people of Assam for a *nationalistic anti-alien stir.* It stated "The issues connected with the rights of the indigenous peoples over the natural resources of the State, which were raised by the people of the state during the Assam agitation, were also cleverly avoided by the Delhiites, who drafted the Accord, said Akhil Gogoi" (Assam Tribune/ Nov 1st 2012).

In recent years various developmental issues have influenced the environmental movement of Assam. The construction of dams in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh has led to a popular movement which initiated another stream of environmentalism in Assam.

The significant point in connection to environmentalism in Assam is that the middle class has been more vocal in leading the environmental movements in Assam. The ideology of the middle class has directed the waves of the movement. Hence the debates and discussions on environmental issues have particularly focused on the visions of the middle class population. The involvement of middle class is reflected in their participation in various activities related to the environment. Even though the marginalized sections have often

participated in various protest movements, the middle class hegemony has always been felt.

In Assam the formal practice of environment conservation started with the British. The transition of jungle into forest was the starting point. This created the space for the middle class. They began to take part in conservation and protection of environment. The middle class of Assam has hijacked environmental issues. Different historical events supply us with evidence that the middle class has been playing a decisive role in negotiating any conflict over the environment. The result is that the major issues have been swept under the carpet. The Assam Movement can be cited as an appropriate example of this. The question of land right and the question of peasantry were the underlying facts of the movement; the primary question was therefore of access to resources. Later on it was transformed into a conflict between "local" and "foreigners". The issue of illegal immigrant has hijacked the other issues like resource sharing and conflict over resource use. This issue dominated the entire political discourse of Assam in subsequent years.

In recent times various environmental issues have become political issues. The issues of erosion, flood and recently, the issue of rhino poaching have been used by the different political parties as part of their election campaign. In the 2014 Loksabha elections these issues gained a lot of importance. The issue of rhino poaching attracted the attention of the national media. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) successfully hijacked the issue of erosion, flood, rhino poaching, illegal immigrant to win the 2014 Parliament elections in Assam. There is a definite reason as to why the issue of rhino poaching occupied a prominent place in Assam. The rhino is not just another animal for the Assamese. The depletion in the population of rhinos was thus projected as an assault on Assamese nationalism. More often than not, it was alleged that there was the hand of "illegal" Bangladeshi immigrants in the crimes of poaching. Thus, the Bharatiya Janata Party was able to use the issue to establish the point in the popular imagination of the Assamese that having already swamped the land with their presence; the "illegal" immigrants were now after their national pride.

The significant point to be derived from the analysis of environmental politics in Assam is that the environment is always discussed side by side with the nationalist question. It is seen that different socio-political organizations talk about these issues from their own perspectives. The organizations are quite selective in involving themselves in the issues. The All Assam Students' Union (AASU), the leading student body of Assam, has always been vocal about the issue of "illegal infiltration" from Bangladesh. They also talk about other environmental issues like flood, erosion and rhino poaching which is the latest inclusion. The AASU has urged the central government to declare flood and erosion as national problems. The notable point is that they project the issues as the biggest threat for nationalistic pride. They try to prove how the rhetoric of neglect by the Indian state is invoked in the process of raised these issues. Similarly, the Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS) has been fighting for the land rights of the indigenous people. It has offered a strong critique of the development policy of the state. It is also spearheaded the anti- big dam movement in Assam. The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) has led a violent protest movement in favour of the secession of Assam from India. It has been fighting against the Government of India for 'Swadhin Asom' (Independent Assam). The members of this organization have been fighting against the Government of India's policy of exporting oil and tea from Assam. The place of another organization Assam Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) is also significant while discussing the environmental politics of Assam.

It is to be mentioned that these organizations have not stuck to these issues only. They have talked about other issues of social concern. I have mentioned about these organizations here in this chapter to throw light on the kind of environmental politics involved. The common argument of these organizations is directed against the process of sharing of natural resources with the groups whom they consider as the 'others'. The 'others' are 'non indigenous' or 'non-native' or 'non-local'.

3.4.1 Representation of Environmental News in Print Media

Assam has witnessed a number of complex environmental issues as it is one of the most ecologically sensitive regions of India. These issues have posed many questions regarding the economic, social, political, and cultural belief systems of Assam. Adoption of neo-liberal philosophy for the purpose of development by the Indian state has created a lot of confusion in a state like Assam. The needs for development are very often in conflict with the environment.

Assam has been frequently encountered by various environmental disasters. Environmental disasters in the form of flood and erosion are perennial problems of Assam. Besides these, man-made destructions have led to several environmental problems which later on have led to social problems. The issues of environment have been discursively organized through different articulations. Different institutional practices are involved in shaping of ecological subjectivity through various environmental discourses. Here the role of media is very prominent.

The print media has played a significant role in defining and classifying the environmental problems of Assam. It has created awareness among the masses about the environmental issues. Since the time of inception of the print media in Assam it has been playing a significant role in representing the environment. The first Assamese newspaper 'Orunudoi' published several articles on the environment. Most of them were on general knowledge and carried information about different topics on the environment. These articles did not foster any kind of knowledge regarding protection and conservation of the environment. Here the contents are filled with only the description about the natural world. The texts identify the readers' position as recipients. It invites readers to know about the natural world. The environment is here projected as the "other". In later years different newspapers, journals and periodicals have created a specific space for the environment. It has been trying to speak on behalf of the natural world.

In this context the names of some newspapers and journals come to mind. Among them *Ajir Batori (not running), Amar Axom, Asomiya Pratidin, Dainik Janasadharan,Daink Asom,* the English daily *Assam Tribune,* Assamese journals

Prantik, Satsori are significant. These newspapers and magazines regularly publish articles on different topics related to the environment. They have created a class of people conscious about various environmental crises and popularized the cult of *environmental activism*. It carved out a space in the public sphere for the cultural and political meaning of the environmental objects that are perceived to be under threat. These have created distinct subject positions within the discourses.

The ecological subjectivity or the ecological subject position encounters various ideologies as well as discourses of environment. The newspapers are the vehicle of initiating certain discourses. The environmental news has a deep impact on policy formulation. At the same time it creates consciousness among the people. But the important thing is that the news published in newspapers are very often based on certain issues or problems. Following are some examples:

Chief minister convenes review meeting on present flood situation, voices concern over wetland encroachment: Floods wreaked crop damage worth Rs. 992 crore, says govt (Seven Sister post July, 12, 2012).

Flood- ravaged villages warn govt of violent protest: Dhemaji anger floods NH-52 (Seven Sister Post, November, 27, 2012).

Declare Flood, Erosion as nat'l problem (The Assam Tribune, July 19, 2012).

The Killing fields: The pride of Assam, the one- horned rhino, is increasingly falling prey to the bullets of ruthless poachers. (Asif Ahmed Hazarika , Horizon, October, 28,2012).

The texts have portrayed the environment in many different ways. Sometimes they use the 'apocalyptic tune'. It is to be mentioned here that the term apocalypse is understood as a kind of revelation regarding the end of the world. Generally it denotes widespread destruction. Resource depletion, damage of the ecosystem, destruction of ozone layer has made life on earth more and more critical. The question of survival is seriously addressed as the carrying capacity of the ecosystems is shaken by the man-created destruction. "Crucially, stocks of non-renewable resources and the capacity of ecosystems to produce renewable

resources and assimilate wastes are treated as finite" (Dryzek 2005, 38). The idea of overshoot and collapse are significant whenever the news texts describe the problem. These texts try to redefine the environmental problems as social problems. This constructionist attitude of the news reporting has made these issues for public and political concern.

The fact is that most of the environmental coverages are event specific. Events and visualizations of the event are the significant characteristics of the texts. These texts are using various rhetorical idioms which help in depicting the image of the problem. The rhetoric of loss, rhetoric of damage, rhetoric of uncertainty are recurrently used in various texts of the news. Apart from this, by using words like *grim,misery, haunt, ravaged, devastated, havoc,* the texts try to visualize the gravity of the problem. These texts provide the representation of different environmental problems of the state of Assam.

3.4.2 Electronic Media and Environment

Besides print media, the radio, television and other electronic media's role in dealing with environmental problem is also significant.

Cinema is another powerful medium in disseminating different discourses. It is one of the most powerful ideological apparatus of contemporary times. Since 1936 Assamese cinema has started its journey with Jyotiprasad Agarwala's debut film *Joymoti*. But the attempt to address any kind of environmental issues through the films is yet to develop as a tradition. Renowned film maker Jahnu Baruah's film *Banani* (1989) was the first film of this kind which got the national award in the category of environment conservation/ preservation. The story of the film is based on the struggle of a forest official against the mercenary and bureaucratic despoliation of forests. "*Banani* (The Forest), [is] based on human exploitation and destruction of the rich forest reservoir of the state, a crisis challenging the basic ethos and sensibilities of man's symbiotic living with nature" (Senapati 2007, 96).

Jwangdao Bodosa's Bodo film 'Hagramayao Jinahari' ('Rape in the Virgin Forest') (1994) has also won the National award. This film is the story of

deforestation and poverty. The storyline of the film narrates the story of a poor villager who lives near a forest and earns his livelihood by depending on it. He is involved in illegal trade of timber. He indulges in illegal trade to marry off his daughter Mithinga. His poverty forces him to be involved in this illegal business of timber. He starts to work for people who are involved in illegal trade of timber. Unfortunately however, he is unable to fulfill his dream. The people for whom he worked rape his daughter Mithinga. In this film Bodosa successfully depicts the two burning issues: poverty and deforestation. The film portrays how the smugglers violate the modesty of not just Mithinga but also of the forest. The English title of the film *Rape in the Virgin Forest* indicates the duality of its meaning. It points to the fact that Mithinga, her poor father and the forests are the victims, perpetrators or observers of the situation. Here spectators are offered the position of ecological subjects who can take the responsibility for individual and collective action. This film also depicts the interconnection of Bodo indigenous life and nature. An ecofeminist perspective is also reflected in the storyline of the film. It is patriarchy combined with capitalism that proves to be the undoing for both nature and women. In the later years this film has been used for the purpose of creating awareness regarding deforestation among the masses in the various places of lower Assam.

Another award winning film 'Juye Pura Xoon' (The Self Triumphs) by Sanjib Sabhapandit deals with the issue of environment. It is the story of the younger generation of Assam. The film shows how the environmental problems of flood and erosion have impacted the socio- economic life of Assam. It also deals with the issue of "illegal infiltration" from Bangladesh.

'Basundhara….the earth' (2009) by Hiren Bora is another award winning movie which deals with the issue of conservation of forests and wildlife. The film is set against the contemporary socio-political backdrop of Assam. The film is about the story of a young girl. Her name is Basundhara. She leads the masses in a movement to find the cause of the man-elephant conflict. Basundhara was deceived by her boyfriend and this inspires her to work for the cause. She joins an NGO which was assigned to work in areas which were affected by the man-elephant conflict. The areas are the fringe villages of a national park.

These media texts have been exercising power and knowledge among the masses. They have been trying to create a space for the environment. In the remaining section of this chapter I intend to analyze the discourses about the increasing activity of killing one horned rhinoceros of Assam. I choose the subject of rhino poaching in this particular chapter with a view to analyzing different discourses around it. The growing instances of poaching have become a significant debate in both national and international stage. Thus the one horned rhino of Assam has become the subject of many discursive formations where the rhino is constructed as the symbol of national as well as cultural identity. It has entered in the discourse of electoral politics.

I have already mentioned in the 2014 Loksabha election the leader of BJP, Narendra Modi used the rampant rhino poaching cases for his election campaign. To quote Modi, "Aren't rhinos the pride of Assam? These days there is a conspiracy to kill it. I am making the allegation very seriously. People sitting in the government …to save Bangladeshis…they are doing this conspiracy to kill rhinos so that the area becomes empty and Bangladeshis can be settled there" (Mathur 2014, 2). The protection of this particular species is to protect and to save Assam.

The following part of the chapter will examine how different discourses are deployed to represent the issue. Tracing the different discourses about the issue an attempt is made to examine how the subjectivity of a wild species is constructed in the context of environmental history of a particular place.

3.5 The Story of Rhino Poaching

Poaching of rhinoceros of different variety in different parts of the world has increased tremendously in the recent years. A worldwide campaign against the act of poaching can create consciousness about the subject. Various international organizations are working for the cause. Both the print as well as electronic media have been working worldwide. They are more or less successful in shaping the conservation discourses in the public front. Apparently, at one point of time the state planned to dehorn the rhino for the sake of its safety. However, thanks to the vociferous protest by the media, the decision was later revoked.

Myth, Science and Reality

A rhinoceros is poached for its horn. It is the species of the category of unicorn, the biblical animal. It is believed in different Asian countries that the properties of rhino horn can be a useful medicine for curing several diseases. Hence it is used in various traditional medicines in many Asian countries. "In his fifty volume pharmacological encyclopedia, the fourth- century Chinese author Li Chih- Cheu stated that the main ailments that could be treated with rhinoceros horn were snakebites, hallucinations, typhoid fever, headaches, boils, curbuncles, vomiting, food poisoning, and "devil possession'" but in addition, " the unicorn horn is a safe guide to tell the presence of poison" (Ellis 2005, 77). Besides China other Asian countries like Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Yemen, and Vietnam have a market for the rhino horn. In comparison to the South African rhino horn, the Asian rhino horn is more coveted.

This mythical discourse is contested by the discourse of science which tries to give another picture of the subject. According to this discourse rhino horn is composed of layers of skin cell which are keratinized. Thus, it discards the traditional believe. In reality the rhinoceros has become an endangered species. Hence the need for conserving this large mammal has become important.

The context

A report in *The Hindu* says, "In the luscious wet forests and golden grasslands of Assam, a keratinous debate is brewing. The debate is about the Rhinocerous unicornis, the one-horned Rhino of India, and its single horn. The rhino, short-tempered and evolutionarily ancient, is an animal with enigma: one which writer Rudyard Kipling described as wearing a suit of armour, a great beast which survived the Pleistocene Mass Extinction of animals, and whose single mounted horn is both a mystery and a product of exceptional evolution." (Mathur 2014).

Poaching of rhino has become a serious problem in various National Parks and wildlife sanctuaries of Assam. More than 40 rhinoceros were killed by poachers in a cycle of one year, revealing the gravity of the situation. The Kaziranga National Park has apparently presented the 'most successful story of

conservation'. But in recent years the rampant killing of rhinoceros questions the very process of conservation. Poaching has become a continuous trend and created a place in the environmental politics of Assam. As a result of this, *Rhinocerous unicornis*, the great Indian one horned rhino has come to figure prominently in the news discourse of Assam in recent years.

The one horned rhino is found in Kaziranga National Park, Orang National Park, Manas National Park, Pobitora Wildlife Century in Assam. For a long time now, Assam has been home to the one-horned rhino, standing as a proud symbol of Assamese nationalism. Within political and social discourses, the rhino has become the popular symbol of Assamese nationalism. Hence the protection and conservation of this species is perceived to be a major responsibility of the government. It has become a part of the nationalist discourse of contemporary times. Singers and poets have celebrated the image of the rhino as a marker of Assamese nationalism. The protest against rampant killing of particular species has created an *imagined community* (Anderson 1983). The rhino is the state animal of Assam which is the prime source of revenue to be earned from tourism. It has a unique place in the socio-political life of Assam. It has become the signifier of ethnicity of the people from Assam. The poaching of rhino has drawn the attention of the conservationist as well as the nationalist leaders. The pictures of the dead body of rhinoceros provide the media with a powerful metaphor for the state of environment in the province. The images help to give the rhino a place in the national identity. The protection and preservation of this species has been at the centre of several socio-political debates in recent years.

The position of the rhino in Assam is defined as the result of the historical situation. "The rhino, unlike the elephant, however, was a species that was neither relegated to the backseat nor ardently sought after by the pre-colonial state. The earliest mention of rhino in regional religious texts can be found in *Kalika Purana* where sacrifice of the rhinoceros that was in practice in Kamakhya temple had been described" (Saikia 2011, 271). In colonial literature the presence of rhino in this region is depicted. "Rhinos are fairly plentiful in some out-of-the way districts and in their erratic course through a garden (a place

that under usual circumstances they steer clear of) play fearful havoc with their unwieldy carcasses amongst the tea" (Barkar 1984, 211).

Kaziranga was created as a game reserve specifically for the sport of rhino. But in later years when the wildlife entered in the larger discourse of conservation, the shooting of rhinoceros was also prohibited. People had the license to hunt animals only if it caused any harm to them. The colonial masters showed their interest in rhinoceros. They considered the rhino as a game animal. Kaziranga was regarded as the place for rhino-sporting. There were two species of rhinoceros in Assam. Records show the existence of the two horned rhinoceros called Sumatrensis in the Brahmaputra Valley. Various accounts of nineteenth century describe that the rhino used to live in the densest and retired parts of the country. It is also found that the horn of the rhino was used for the purpose of medicine in various Asian countries. Rhino horn was used as an object of trade with other forest products. According to some records the rhino was domesticated. There is also historical evidence about the private ownership of rhino. "M' Cosh, also mentioned the export of the young calves to Europe. By the early twentieth century, the entry of mercantile capital into rhino horn trade became well known" (quoted in Saikia 2011, 271). Evidences are there about the supply of rhino to the other places like Kolkata and Europe.

The poaching of rhino was started in the early twentieth century. Gradually it has posed a big threat for the survival of the animal. "By the early twentieth century the threat of rhino poaching had reached a frightening level. There was rampant killing of the rhino and it attracted the attention of the public too. In 1903, *Times of Assam* published a letter that decried the extensive killing of animals. The writer lamented the rampant way in which the local Mikirs had taken to the profession of killing. By this time even hunters from Bengal arrived in large numbers to have an experience of killing the animals, resulting in reckless and indiscriminate destruction of all the game in the province" (Saikia 2011, 269-270).

Gradually the one horned rhino was in threat of extinction. The rapid growth of rhino poaching has been attracting the attention of the public. Apart from

poaching, the increased rate of deforestation as well as the expansion of the agrarian frontier became the threat for the survival of rhino and other wild life habitats too. Hence the need to protect the species began to draw public attention. During the pre- independence British period the concern for protecting this animal got importance. After a long debate and discussion certain rules and regulations came into force with intent to protect several species. Proposal for an asylum for rhino was also staged. This had led to the formation of a game reserve at Kaziranga. In 1905 Kaziranga was declared as game reserve to stop the practice of hunting. There was a strict prohibition on the hunting of the rhino. "Hunting, shooting, trapping and fishing within a game reserved forest was absolutely prohibited. Complete prohibition of hunting came in the case of female rhinoceros and buffalo, accompanied by their young calves; hunting of female bison and green pigeon was also prohibited" (Saikia 2009, 118).In the year 1916 Kaziranga game reserve was transformed into a game century. Saikia states, "A change in the semantic gradually helped to dissociate the work ethics of the game reserve from that of the forestry, primarily aimed at forest economy. Since then a few foresters' pro-animal focus within the general framework of the Forest Department's ideological paradigm came to have a significant bearing for keeping the beginning" (Saikia 2009, 119). Those developments provided the legal protection to rhino and simultaneously it began to consider the rhino horn and ivory as forest produce. This determined the political economy of the rhino horn. It constructed the subjectivity of the rhino as an important wildlife species as well as the species to generate revenue. But the revenue generated from rhino was not much. According to information, in the year 1949 the forest department of Assam sold one rhino to Cairo Zoo and earned an amount of Rs. 20,000.00 (Saikia 2011, 276).

However the act of poaching of rhino was continued in a rampant way. "[I]n mid-1930s a forester wrote that about forty carcasses of rhino were removed from North Kamrup game sanctuary, now known as Manas, with the horns removed. Widespread and extensive poaching camps in almost all water bodies known as *bhils,* inside the Kaziranga Game Sanctuary, were noticed as early as the 1930s" (Saikia 2009, 119). It proves that poaching gradually posed a serious threat to this

endangered species. It is easy to trace the movement tract of rhino as it deposits its dung in the same place.

Rhino and the Nationalist discourse

In the post-independence period the rhino took on a new meaning. Its rarity, endangered nature and abandonment have constructed it as the most prestigious animal. It came to find a prominent place in the nationalist discourse. It was recognized as a state symbol. "The one- horned rhino became a state emblem in 1948. Official acceptance of rhino as the state symbol of Assam gave further political credibility to the cause of the rhino" (Saikia 2011, 276). The international demand for rhino horn made poaching a thorny issue in Assam. In the year 1954 an Act was passed by the Assam Government (Assam Rhinoceros Preservation Bill). It aims to protect the rhino from being killed, captured and injured (The Rhinoceros Preservation Bill 1954). In due course of time the rhino became the natural as well as national heritage of Assam. It is considered as the state animal of Assam and is protected under India's Wildlife Act.

One horned rhinoceros thus came to be regarded as the pride of Assam. It helps in the growth of tourism and at the same time, it generates revenue. The above discussion helps us to make the point clear that the identity of the animal is determined by the large account of national as well as international discourses. The subjectivity of the animal is the result of that discursive formation. Both the popular and official discourse about the great Indian rhinoceros related to conservation and other aspects will help to know the dynamics of environmental politics.

Rhino Poaching in Assam has become the most talked about debate in recent years. It has received much media coverage and political attention. "It appears that issues are sustained by factors intrinsic to the nature of the issue, by a certain degree of fortuitousness and by external social and political forces" (Anderson 1997, 147). The reason why the rhino poaching attracted so much media coverage during the cycle of one year more than 40 rhinos were poached for its horn. It has created lot of pressure upon the conservation of the particular species. It has become the key news event in both the print and electronic media.

Another reason is the "visibility of an environmental event" (Anderson 1997). The media coverage of the rhino killing is largely expressed through the visual "appeal" of the dead animal. The press coverage of the rhino is largely concentrated on the visual "appeal" of the rhino carcasses with the bleeding head after removal of the horn. They used close-up photographs of the large animal. Those visual images represent the pathetic condition of the innocent animal. These pictures have made the one horned rhino of Assam an icon for environmental crisis. Various news discourses on rhino poaching use different metaphors to take an action against this big environmental crisis in Assam. Different electronic and print media launched a campaign against the very act of poaching as "Save the rhino, pride of Assam".

Another factor is the impact of the discourse of national identity and the identity of Kaziranga and Assam. The identity of Assam is visualized through the image of the one-horned rhino. The concern for Kaziranga is also reflected in discussions on this issue. Kaziranga's visibility in the international arena, it has been felt, will be determined by this particular animal. The need for preservation of this animal thus got more importance when it was declared as endangered. Another point is that its population density is high in the forest of Assam, especially in Kaziranga. The ecology of the region is favourable for the rhino population in Assam.

In case of rhino story it matters for the different political actors. Many a time the fate of the rhino became secondary to some other issues. The following news report translated from an Assamese news paper can be cited as an example for this: "Political Comrade as Poacher: Rhino Killing! Power game at Dispur behind it" (Sadin /5thOct, 2012). The News stated that after the ethnic conflict in BTAD the same dirty politics is behind the regular poaching of rhino in Assam. The political leaders are busy in blaming each other, diminishing the importance of the subject. Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi stated that "The numbers were more in the period of AGP (Asom Gana Parishad) government". They are trying to use this politically. On the other hand, various non political organizations have protested against the killing of rhino. They state that the illegal encroachment in

the forest especially in Kaziranga is one of the important causes of increasing rate of rhino poaching.

Thus the discourse of conservation of one horned rhinoceros in Assam duly formed an ethnic community who bears the identity of "Assamese- the people of Assam" by crossing the boundary of all the racial as well as territorial affinity. This group bears the ethos of nationalism reflected in "Save rhino- save Assam".

3.6 Environmental Subjectivity: Representation of Environmental Issues in School Text Books

Modern environmental discourse has paid increasingly greater attention to the cultural dimension. Environmentalists of today point out that environmental discourse cannot be separated from culture. Thus, environmental analysts pay attention to cultural politics. Power plays a decisive role in imposing an order or pattern to people's responses to a given situation. We are using the word 'power' in the Foucauldian sense. "Cultural politics is about the way in which different systems of ordering are either maintained or imposed on others, how questions of identity feature within environmental discourse, how social relationships get redefined, or how particular ways of doing things either get reproduced or are changed" (Fischer and Hajer ed. 1999,8).

In the modern educational system the matter of the environment has become an issue of prime concern. It is important to take note of how various discourses of environmentalism are being used in the school text books of Assam. An attempt has been mad here to analyse the environmental discourses as cultural politics in line with the Althusserian notion of subject formation (Althusser 1971, 2006). Without lending too much weight to the deterministic nature of Althusserian 'interpellation', it would be right to say that his theory is helpful to understand the way in which the capitalist system produces 'willing workers'. By extension, this theory can also be used to make sense of the ways in which the capitalist system and its discourse on environmentalism produces 'ecological subjects'.

Environmental education was introduced in the school curriculum as part of the environmental consciousness programme. It was a state venture to campaign for

the environment. In Assam, as elsewhere, a separate discipline has been introduced in the school curriculum to impart environmental knowledge. These school text books play a significant role in the process of various discursive formations on the environment. In this respect the analysis of environmental knowledge presented in the school text books will help to draw a picture of the dominant environmental discourses. It will give us an idea about the ideology that shapes the environmental knowledge that is on offer in these texts. Further, it is also interesting to study if local environmental issues find a place alongside global issues in these texts. The image of the individual and its subjectivity are the main concern of modern societies. Subject positions are constructed through various ideologies as well as different social positions.

Critical theory has tended to use the term "subject" instead of "self" when it discusses the cultural construction of personal as well as collective identity. In the tradition of critical theory, subject position and subjectivity have been discussed from various perspectives. Descartes's famous dictum *I think, therefore I am* initiated the study of subjectivity. In due course of time different philosophical tradition has analysed subject from different perspectives. The anti-realists and anti-idealists reject both Descartes and idealism as they believe that subject or subjectivity is not the product of self governing consciousness.

In this paper we are using the post-modernist, post-structuralist position, to analyse the construction of subjectivity. According to post-modern analysis a subject is merely an effect of discourse or a "position within language." Subject and subjectivity are the products of specific culture and ideology.

Ecological subjectivity is formed by the hegemonic discourses of environment that are in vogue at a given point in time. By offering environmental education to the students the school text books initiate specific forms of control and means of organising subjectivity. These texts are the means of disciplinary control in respect of regulation of ecological/environmental activities of the children in the society. These texts produce certain discourses which offer different ways of understanding human engagement with the environment.

The rise of environmental texts in the school curriculum has increased the popularity of the global environmental movement. The texts are designed with the motive of developing environmental consciousness among the students. They focus on fostering a relationship between natural communities and human communities. These texts mostly focus on the environmental problems in terms of ecological crisis. Here we are trying to analyse 4 text books (Class iii, vii, viii and ix) from Assam (SCERT and SEBA) which emphasize issues and concerns of an environmental nature. These text books are published by the Assam State Textbook Production and Publication Corporation Limited. The State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) is involved in the process of preparation of text books for class III, VII. These text books are the vehicle for disseminating the kind of dominant ideas regarding the environment. We have highlighted some important points from the texts:

Position1. Environment is a structure. All the living bodies on earth need favourable conditions for sustenance of life. These conditions are created by sunlight, air, water, soil, etc. Environment, therefore, means all the physical, social and cultural factors and conditions which influence the existence, sustenance and development of a living body or assemblage of living bodies. The destruction of one component will lead to the destruction of other parts. (Chiring 2005, 1)

Position 2. The ecosystem is defined as "an integrated system in which living and non-living factors of the environment interact. The interaction occurs by means of food chain, energy-flow and other activities" (Chiring 2005, 2). Environment is a composite whole. We are part of it.

Position 3. Water is life. It has a multifarious role in every aspect of life. It is precious and limited, and thus it has to be preserved for future.

Position 4. Natural calamities can destroy our environment. Here nature is described as the absolute authority. The natural calamities have socio-cultural implications.

Position 5. Acid rains, Ozone Layer destruction, Nuclear energy production, Global Warming are the major environmental problems. If we do not control soil erosion, water pollution, noise pollution, air pollution as well as soil pollution it will be a threat for human existence. The unlimited use of pesticides and manure will destroy the fertility of the soil.

Clean environment is necessary for sound health. Different kinds of pollution destroy the sound health of the environment. The population explosion has a great impact on the environment.

These problems are described as threats for survival in this planet. The chapter begins thus: "An environment is said to be ideal or balanced, when all the living and non-living components of nature exist with mutual co-operation and in perfect harmony" (Chiring 2005, 20). The environmental problems are regarded as social problems.

Position 6. Sustainable use of natural resources and its conservation will help in economic development.

Position 7. Tree plantation helps in soil conservation. Tree plantation can reduce air pollution. *Xeoji Dharani,* the green earth should be the hope for our future. When there is tree; there is man. The forests are described as the heart beat of nature.

Position 8. People should be conscious about different environmental laws.

Position 9. When the texts talk about pollution in every sphere it condemns industrial culture as one of its important causes.

Position 10: In the text book of class vii environmental problems and consciousness about environment find a significant place. It discusses about environment and environmental problems from various perspectives.

'Go green and preserve greenery for the better health of the earth' is one of the basic ideologies behind the texts. Nature is not alienated from human society; it is part of society. The word 'environment' always comes with the word 'our'. Social constructionist ideology is the guiding principle behind this. It indicates

that nature is not alienated from human society. The interconnectedness between man and nature is aptly depicted in these texts to build "consciousness" among the youths. The international discourse about ozone depletion, global warming finds mention. Discourse of deforestation has guided the kinds of chapters which concentrate more on tree plantation. The sustainable use of natural resources will give human being a better future, thus indicating that the natural resources have some economic value.

The text books are certainly designed for developing ecological consciousness. It tries to develop a new kind of relationship between the human world and natural communities. The texts emphasise the disappearance of plants, animals and other species of nature, the loss of land-productivity, the scarcity of water, air pollution etc. The texts are informed by the western environmental thought. The contemporary Western scholarship on environmental philosophy is reflected in these texts. They are concerned about the reciprocal relationship among different life forms and they recognize the earth as a living being.

Analysis of Environmental Discourse in School Text Books

The above descriptions of the contents of the prevailing school textbooks help us to unfold the kind of ideology behind it. The various discourses applied in those texts try to highlight different aspects of the environment. Dryzek's classification of environmental discourse (Dryzek, 2005) i.e. survivalism, sustainability, green radicalism are the important discourses in the text books. These environmental discourses open up certain specific ways of knowing about and talking about the environment. It constructs the ecological subjectivity; the human being becomes an ecological subject.

Environment is a structure

These texts recognize the existence of environment as system whose parts are interrelated. Both the lower primary and upper primary level texts suggest that humans along with the ecosystem are threatened. These set of ideas basically try to give a general definition of the environment. It tries to depict the environment as a structure. The text books of class III and VII are named *Our Environment*.

The title suggests the attempt to make the individual conscious about his/her space in the biological environment. The texts bring the environment to focus. The environment can be understood here as a system. There exists a reciprocal relation among a set of facts, rather than particular facts being considered in isolation. It can be analysed as a signifying system from the structuralist point of view.

Human beings are here regarded as a category. The environment too is a category. The text offers a description of human engagement with nature or environment. It advocates respect for the environment and ask others not to be rude to the environment. Therefore, a patronising attitude marks man's relationship with the environment.

The Environment is a global issue

Environmental consciousness programme is a worldwide intervention. The texts in question try to connect the individual to the wider world. There is an attempt to create a global society of environment-conscious people. On the other hand, the principles of modern environmental ethics try to give a more inclusive view of environment. It has established the connection between race, class, environmental ills, and ills of industrialism. It includes range of diverse issues like deforestation, radiation exposure from uranium mining and nuclear wastes, struggle for water rights, substandard housing and various kinds of social and environmental ills. But the important point is that it fails to address the local issues, especially of Assam.

The Environment as resource

In spite of conscious attempts made, the texts conceptualize the environment by using the metaphor of environment as resource. The four text books are based on the metaphor of environment as resource. It gives more emphasis to the limited natural resources which are essential for the survival of human beings. The texts also emphasize the importance of those resources in human life. Each text contains chapters like *Natural Resources, Environment in Economy* depicting the environment as a source of resource generation, helping in the growth of the

economy. It is involved with the discourse of industrialism though the texts apparently reject industrialism on many occasions. Thus, there is a contradiction in the treatment of environment in these texts. The perspective that they offer on the environment is one borrowed from industrialism while overtly the texts call for a move away from industrialization.

In this connection several other discourses of environment find mention here. The discourse of sustainability is an important example. It involves several other principles – of economic growth, conservation and protection of environment and distributive justice. It supports development, specifically sustainable development. But again there are no indications regarding how this goal of sustainable development is to be achieved.

Representation of 'Eco-Catastrophe'

The texts demonstrate and discuss the human activities towards environment which are constructed as dangerous and immoral. According to this discourse the catastrophic changes are the outcome of human impact on environment. It is the human beings, motivated by their own interests who exploit the environment. The text book of class vii, vii and ix focus on diverse phases of ecocatastrophe encountered by human beings.

Environment is portrayed through the 'Apocalyptic' Tune

These texts have portrayed the environment through the 'apocalyptic tune'. Resource depletion, damage of the ecosystem, destruction of ozone layer has made life on earth more and more critical. The question of survival is seriously addressed as the carrying capacity of the ecosystems is shaken by the man-created destruction. "Crucially, stocks of non-renewable resources and the capacity of ecosystems to produce renewable resources and assimilate wastes are treated as finite" (Dryzek 2005, 38). The idea of overshoot and collapse are significant whenever the texts analyse the future of earth. The text of class VII is designed with a view to discuss various environmental problems. There are three chapters which discuss about various problems of environment. The chapters are titled as *We and Polluted Air, We and Water Pollution, We and the Calamities.*

Here discourses about the environment have contributed to the sense we have of ourselves as ecological subjects.

The text book of class VIII and IX also discuss about the various problems of environment. On many occasions men's activities are said to be responsible for these problems: the underlying argument is that manmade destruction happens because of industrialization, deforestation, illegal encroachment. The survivalist tendency mostly influences these activities. It reveals that there exist a situation of conflict and hierarchy between nature and human being.

Contesting the Eco-catastrophe-Greening the Earth

Each of the text books provides a description of the consequence of population growth, consequence of development, extinction of forest areas. At same time the texts popularise the discourse of green consciousness among the pupils. Its main purpose is to socialise the school children into less destructive ways of interacting with the environment. It depicts the position of school children as activist. Environmental protection through the tree plantation is the primary aim of those texts. Each of the texts makes strong argument to achieve that goal. However, in doing this, the texts leave a lot of questions unaddressed and unanswered. This happens mainly because of the decontextualizing of environmental discourse from its socio-cultural moorings. It appears as if students are asked to think of the environment as a separate entity, isolated from its context. Thus, while we are faced with a world that encourages people to be more and more materialistic and consumerist, to buy more and more; students are asked to be very conscious about saving the 'resources'. What is left unsaid is the fact that the modern gadgets and equipments that the present society encourages us to buy with the active support of the state relies on these very resources for their running.

Further, problems are dealt with at the superficial level instead of looking at the structures that help to generate the forms of domination over the environment. Thus, they reveal a lack of both wider socio-political realities as well as of the covert structures of domination that shape the relationship between man and environment. "Although we see no categorical reason for *excluding* the invocation of nature as a ground for judgment, we remain deeply suspicious of

arguments from the natural sciences being used to support social and cultural policies and practices. Descriptions of the physical world are not prescriptions for social life" (Gough and Price 2004, 6). Many of the things have been left unsaid in these texts. To conclude this section, the following points can be made:

1. Movements for the protection of the environment in various parts of the country find little mention in the texts.
2. These texts give far greater importance to "global" environmental issues.
3. Natural resources can be fruitfully used for the greater development of humanity.
4. Problems are dealt with at the superficial level without any attempt being made to understand the structures of exploitation that help in the continuance of environmental degradation.
5. Local examples, when they do figure, are seen through and interpreted in terms of globally circulating environmental discourses.
6. Perspectives of new forms of environmental theories such as deep ecology and Ecofeminism do not find a place here. Conservation of nature continues to be seen as important because of its utility for human beings; the environment has to be protected for our survival, not for its own sake.
7. The texts could not able to offer the best possible approach to meet the harmful effect of environment.

Globalization's tendency to homogenize local environmental problems has actually led to the negligence of local problems. Environmental discourse has become trans-cultural discourse. The globalist tendency of environmental consciousness programme imposes an overarching hegemony. These texts propagate the kind of discourse which is apparently becoming too strong to counter. A strong under-current of science is behind all the ecological messages. However, the point is to look beyond this and critically analyze how these issues are placed in the idiom of environmental politics of Assam. In case of school text books the knowledge about the local environmental problems needs to be incorporated in the curriculum. It will help the students to realize the reality of the situation.

In the next Chapter I will discuss about another thread of environmental politics and subjectivity formation with reference to development politics in Assam.