

## Chapter-6

### Conclusion

At the initial stage of my research I decided to build up my argument on environmentalism in Assam. I decided to analyze various discourses in and around different environmental debates which originated in Assam. I wanted to look at different discursive formations about the environment.

The intention of the present work was to see the formation and development of the different discursive formation for the purpose of investigating the environmentalism of Assam. Within the Indian subcontinent Assam constitutes a distinctive territorial identity with a distinctive socio-historical condition. In the first chapter I have given a historical sketch of the environment of Assam. Assam was subjugated by British after signing of the *Yandaboo Treaty* in the year 1826. In the British period the natural environment of Assam got a new meaning. It was viewed as a commodity. The British era in Assam changed the pattern of consumption. The management of the forests and other natural resources is largely an outcome of the British intervention. It offers an account of the transformation of natural environment over the decades. It helps us to build the argument about the process of natural resources being transformed into “national” wealth through the system of governance. It has altered the definition of the relationship between people and the environment. This helps us to know about the process of formation of environmental discourse in Assam. It also helps us to drive home the point that the socio- political and economic situation has a strong impact on the discursive formation of an environmental issue.

In the second chapter I have discussed the theoretical approaches adopted for the study. In this chapter I have clarified several concepts which are widely used to build up my argument.

In the third chapter I have discussed the politics of environment in India in general and the case of Assam in particular. The environmental politics in Assam can be realized as a part of social movements. In this chapter I have discussed how media represents environmental issues. Media plays a crucial role in

representing issues. Many a time it creates confusion too. I have taken the case of rhino poaching in Assam which has attracted a lot of media attention in recent years. In this chapter I have discussed how the issue of the one-horned rhino is historically and culturally situated. This chapter tries to focus on the subjectivity of an animal as constructed in a socio- historical situation of a society. I tried to focus on the kind of environmental governance involved in the formation of animal subjectivity. I analyze how media texts develop the issue of rhino poaching. It is associated with many debates and controversies. It got importance in the public debate when it finds place in the electoral politics. Thus this chapter is an attempt to realize the significance of the issue by incorporating a historical account of the position of the rhino in Assam.

In the fourth chapter I look at the issues in and around development politics in Assam. In recent decades, every issue in Assam has come to be related to the politics of identity. Development issues in Assam are no exception to this. The post-development theorists' view of development as a myth or fantasy is consciously or unconsciously used by the actors whenever any kind of development debate arises in Assam. I have discussed here the recent development debate which is concentrating on the government's initiative in the construction of big dam in this region. The issue of big dam has in turn generated several other discourses. For instance, it has become a regular feature of the election manifestoes of political parties to make clear their stand on the issue.

Very quickly, the issue of big dams has turned into a social movement like in other parts of India. It is perceived to be a threat to the survival of indigenous life in this region. It is felt to be a threat to the ecological future of the region. The slogan of environmentalism is contrasted with the ethos of developmentalism. Developmentalism has become a shared ideology of the various sections of the society in this region. They express their desire for an alternative development. The subjectivity of one group is constructed by another. The very idea of the "Assamese" and other ethnic identities figures prominently in the debate. The identity activists are staging their fear through this medium of protest. I have analyzed different discourses to substantiate the point about how these discourses

are crystallized at a given point of time. The issue of sustainability has been used to legitimize the development activities proposed by the state.

The fifth chapter looks at the women- environment relationship in the context of Assam. The chapter reviews the ideas of relationship between women and nature as we come across in ecofeminist discourses. The growth of ecofeminism has been discussed by putting forward different examples from India. In this chapter I look at women's activism in India to depict their role in developing and shaping the ecofeminist movement in India. Assam, a state of India, has rarely figured in these ecofeminist discourses. There have not been many studies done on the women- environment relationship in Assam. As in other parts of India, the position of a woman in Assam is also defined by patriarchy. I tried to develop an idea about how various environmental problems appear before women living in Assam. I have incorporated different case histories (narratives) which reveal the seriousness and reality of the problems. I took up the case of rural women who used to work in the field.

In case of Assam, environmentalism has always seen an indirect realization. Undeniably, it is a strong undercurrent but it remains covered up by other issues. The series of ethnic clashes, territorial demand, ethnic movements for greater political autonomy are based on the root cause of natural resource sharing. Environmental imaginations are used for shaping political ideology in different ethnic movements in Assam.

In the situation of a crisis, the environment is used as symbol. This is what has happened in the case of rhino poaching. Electronic and print media has applied visual images to sensationalize the issue and give it a political colour. The media frequently presents visual images of the scenic beauty of Kaziranga and the one horned rhinoceros. Certain pictures visualize the dead body of this huge animal and its bleeding head. Media uses the rhetoric of 'national heritage' to establish the connecting link between rhino, Kaziranga and Assam. However, this has been generally done with the intention of pointing out the failure of one political party or the other. In doing this, their treatment of the issue appears to be superficial.

There are hardly any attempts to look at the feasibility of any structural changes which can effectively put an end to such crises.

The importance of international legitimacy to an environmental problem is an important characteristic of environmentalism in Assam. Environmentalism in Assam today figures in the discourses of global environmentalism and global mass media. That rhetoric of popular environmental advocacy by the international agencies is redefined by certain discourses which are upheld by the ethos of nationalism. The very question of nationalism in Assam is informed by the discourse of indigeneity and ethnicity. This is reflected in the analysis of the anti big dam movement in Assam. The report of World Commission on Dams in the year 2000 can be regarded as a landmark in legitimizing the movement.

Environmental philosophy in Assam is steeped in different rhetorical idioms. Many a time it neglects different classes of the society. It forgets that people in our society are hierarchically located in the social set-up. Assamese society is marked by different social stratifications: class, caste, gender, tribe, language, region, religion. Environmentalism has often reflected its insensitivity toward these hierarchies. Taking an example from the perspective of gender, the hard realities faced by women at the time of disaster are hardly taken up for academic discussions. At the same time environmentalism in Assam, which is a large social movement today, has muted the class conflict within different groups of society. To make clear this point, the researcher would like to quote two experiences that she underwent in the field.

It was the story of the period when the anti big dam movement had taken an aggressive turn in Assam. Fasting, road blockades and street protests were frequent. At that period, the authorities involved in the process of construction of big dams in this region, surveyed several places for the potential route for transportation of electricity to other regions of India once hydro-power was generated. There is one route which is reported to pass through areas of Sonitpur and other adjacent districts. This report is from a village of Sonitpur. The route crosses certain agricultural lands of the villagers some of them were relatively prosperous. The “company” gave compensation for use of their land. Everyone

got more than lakh (one to three lakhs) of rupees. They were very happy to get such a huge amount of money at a time. They planned marriages and other celebrations. Some of them started some other businesses. When I asked one of them (once he was a member of the student organization fighting against big dams) who was also in the list of “beneficiaries” whether he had heard about the ongoing protest against big dams, he simply replied: “We know but so what? We have never seen such a huge amount of money in our life time. We used to do hard work but never got such an amount of money from anywhere. Sometimes flood and draught become major problems for us. How can we produce such an amount from such a small piece of land? We are not taking bribe. We give them land, they give us money. I am unable to do certain things as I have no money. I cannot protect my roof because of the scarcity of money”.

Another story dates back to the year 2010. On 27/1/2010 I was on the way to Matmora, a place near Dhakuakhana of the district of Lakhimpur on a Tata Sumo. I got introduced to a female co- passenger from Matmora. She was on her way to Dhakuakhana town for some work. I started to talk to her about her place and about her problems. She tried to give a description of the devastating floods of the last two-three years. As we were going to the same place, we got down together. At the time of getting down she asked me in a matter-of-fact manner, “Which government department are you from? Are you going to announce any relief fund for us as we are still living on the bank of the river? Look there, those are our houses. Have you seen the condition? Is your government going to give something to us?” This volley of questions was directed at me without a pause.

The work is an attempt to address the gap in understanding environmental politics in Assam. It examines diverse environmental discourses. The perspective of Cultural Studies is used primarily to make a critical analysis of the discourses. It tries to analyze how environmental discourses shape ecological subjectivity in the context of Assam. The thesis attempts to analyze the environmental discourse by setting it up against the experiences of the people, particularly women. It tries to link the environmental discourse with processes through which it serves as means to some other ends. The study proves that the environmental discourse is an important way to understand the multiple meanings. The study attempts to

analyze the nature of environmental politics in Assam by understanding the broad political economy of environment.

To conclude, environmental discourses are structurally connected to gender and class inequalities. To ignore the extra-discursive would be imprudent. But in the context of Assam the gap between the extra-discursive and the discursive has become too wide at times. There is a disparity between the players involved in the environmental debates in Assam and the lived experiences of people who are impacted by natural disasters like floods. There is thus an urgent need to make sense of the kind of gap that has come about in the perception of the environment at the material level and the level of discourse.