

## **Abstract**

The concern for ecology and environment has come to occupy a place of great importance in the academic circles. Like many other movements of the world, environmental consciousness can be termed as a product of the 1960s. The environment has today come to be seen as a social construction. Environmental discourses are quite obviously influenced by cultural factors and other institutions of society. Environment has a distinctive connection with broader cultural, political as well as ethical concerns. It remains a critical issue of great concern.

Assam is situated in the North-Eastern Part of India. It is rich in natural “resources”. In the place of environmental history of India, Assam occupies a significant place. But it is very difficult to chalk out the “major” environmental issues in Assam in contemporary times. Mass media is quite vocal in highlighting environmental issues. What will be treated as a “major” environmental issue at a given point in time will depend on the socio-political context. Environmental issues have become socio-political issues of contemporary Assam as they have even impacted electoral politics. During the Loksabha elections of 2014 the problem of flood, erosion and increasing number of rhino poaching got a lot of importance. Numbers of social organizations of Assam have urged the Central Government to declare flood and erosion problem as national problems.

The man-environment relationship in Assam is different from that in “mainstream” India. There are instances in history when some environmental issues have been pushed to the backburner. The famous Assam movement of 1979-85 can be an important example of that. An analysis of the causes of the movement shows that resource sharing was one of the core issues of the movement in the initial stage. But in the course of development of the movement the issue of illegal immigrant masked the other issues. In more recent years, different ethnic clashes that have taken place in the region which can be traced back to a conflict over access to resources.

This issue actually became the starting point for my research on the politics of environment in the context of Assam. While it is a fact that there are a host of environmental problems that afflict Assam, only some of these problems get talked

about at a given point of time. The environment is not seen or treated as independent of other issues – it has in fact become a tool to drive home a point. In other words, because of the space for environmentalism and the world wide concern for the environment, different socio-political actors have tended to ‘talk through’ the environment. In such a scheme of things, the environment occupies a place that is secondary to ethnicity, indigeneity, gender and class. Thus, in the discourses of environment, talking about environmental issues becomes a ploy, a method with which to talk about other issues. The environment is thus a symbol for something else; the symbolic use of the environment to address socio-political issues has become a marked feature of the environmental discourse in Assam. These discourses lead to the formation of environmental subjectivity. The main objectives of my research are to look at the following points:

To decode environmental discourse by setting it up against the social and political context of Assam. To analyze how the discourses about environment have shaped ecological subjectivity in the context of Assam. To set this discourse up against the lived experiences of people, particularly women. To understand the process by which the environmental issues have become a means to meet other ends such as those of indigeneity.

The chapters are designed in the following way. The first chapter is the Introduction. The second chapter tries to give an account of the major theoretical approaches and different concepts which are used for the purpose of analysis throughout the dissertation. The third chapter discusses the politics of environment. It discusses how environmental subjectivity is formed and shaped by different texts and discourses. Different media texts along with school text books have been discussed in this chapter. The fourth chapter is on development and environment. The introduction of neo-liberal economy in the developing nations has created conflicts among the stakeholders. In the contemporary period of intensive and pervasive global capitalist expansion, several development projects have been launched in the region. The construction of big dams is an ambitious project taken up by the government with a purpose to generate hydro power. It has generated a lot of debate in the civil society. This chapter will analyze the discourses of the stakeholders, academics and intellectuals. The fifth chapter titled ‘Gender and Environment: Issues of Convergence’ looks at the ways in which the two marginal

discourses of gender and environment address common concerns in Assam. It also looks at the ways in which the dynamics of woman-environment relationship in Assam is different from that of the rest of the country. The sixth chapter will form the conclusion of the work.