

# **CHAPTER 4**

## **IMPOVERISHMENT RISK AND RECONSTRUCTION MODEL AND DAM INDUCED DISPLACEMENT IN NORTH EAST INDIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO LOWER SUBANSIRI HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT**

### **PART: I**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION:**

*“.....next to killing a man, the worst you can do is to displace him.”*----Thayer Scudder<sup>1</sup>

The northeast India consists of eight states- Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. Sikkim is the new member of the region. Although it is consisted of eight states the region is popularly known as ‘land of seven sisters’. The region is connected with the rest of the India through a narrow corridor, popularly known as ‘*chicken neck*’. It is a multilingual, multi racial, multi ethnic, multi religious as well as multi cultural region. The region is the most suitable replica of ‘unity amidst diversity’ because it is the home of innumerable tribes, ethnic cultures and a wide variety of socio-cultural-religious as well as national minorities. The region is well known for its biodiversity hotspot all over the world. Arunachal Pradesh has recognized as World’s second cultural biodiversity hotspot.

#### **4.2 DEVELOPMENT IN NORTH EAST INDIA:**

In spite of innumerable natural resources this region has always been treated as periphery of ‘mainland’ India. Unfortunately, the region has declared as one of the ‘disturbed areas’ of the nation due to massive and continuous ethnic violence in the post

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<sup>1</sup>Scudder, Thayer (1995), *‘Ecology and Equity: Passing on the Costs’*, New Delhi, Penguin, P.71.

independent period. The region has to face environmental degradation in the forms of unprecedented floods, landslide, earthquake, etc. Especially the devastating earthquake of 1950 changed topography of the region, particularly in Upper Assam. In this backdrop, development has remained a subject of contestation for India's North East.<sup>2</sup>

But the situation has started to change gradually since 1970s onwards. In order to minimize ethnic tensions, the Government of India has decided to invest more and more for developmental activities in this region. For this purpose, a ministry of "Development of North East Region" (DONER) has been created at the Centre. Due to 'geographical space' abundantly available in this region the Government of India has decided to make this region as 'powerhouse of India'. Hence, the Centre has approved of 168 dams including both mega dams and small dams to be built in the region. Out of 168 dams, 149 were given ranks A and B which indicates 'high viability'. Among them a few have been completed and many more are in the pipeline. It has been estimated that North East India alone can generate 38 per cent of India's total hydroelectric power. It has the potentiality to generate 63,328 MW electricity. Among the eight states of the region, Arunachal Pradesh has been considered as most suitable site for construction of mega dams due to its low density of population. Therefore, out of 168 projects, 89 have been reserved for Arunachal Pradesh by the Centre. The task of constructing these dams have been vested in the hands of National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC), North Eastern Electric Power Corporation (NEEPCO), the Brahmaputra Board and State Electricity Boards. According to the deal, host state would receive 12% out of the total power generated freely. In addition to these mega hydroelectric projects, around 900 major and minor hydroelectric projects have been figured out in order to meet the

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<sup>2</sup>Hussain, Monirul (2007), *Interrogating Development: State, Displacement and Popular Resistance in North East India*, SAGE publication, New Delhi, P. 100

regional needs of the northeastern belt of the country. For this reason state governments usually do not raise any questions against such mega dams.<sup>3</sup>

The following table will give a picture of potentiality of North East India to generate hydroelectric power.

TABLE 4.1

Hydroelectric Power Potential of North East India

STATES	TOTAL HYDROELECTRIC POWER (IN MEGAWATT)	PER CENTAGE OF TOTAL POWER POTENTIAL OF NE INDIA
ASSAM	351	1.10
ARUNACHAL PRADESH	26,756	83.99
MEGHALAYA	1,070	3.36
MANIPUR	1,176	3.69
TRIPURA	9	0.03
MIZORAM	1,455	4.57
NAGALAND	1,040	3.26
TOTAL	31,857	100.00
Source: Anon 2004, Presentation to the Union Power Ministry, National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC), Delhi.		

The journey of dam proliferation has been started from 2001 onwards in the North Eastern region of India. In 2001, the Central Electric Authority (CEA) has conducted its preliminary ranking study on potentiality to generate hydroelectricity amongst Indian states. In this survey, the Brahmaputra river basin has been awarded highest marks. The

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid

Brahmaputra river system includes Barak and other south flowing rivers like Teesta, Subansiri, Kameng, Kalang, Dihang, Dibang and Lohit.<sup>4</sup>

The irony is that Asom Gana Parishad (henceforth AGP), the first ever regional political party of Assam submitted a memorandum in 1988 to Rajiv Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India demanding a series of hydroelectric projects for this region on the Brahmaputra river basin in order to control floods but subsequently, the same party opposed vehemently when the Government of India came up with the Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Projects in the first decade of the new millennium.<sup>5</sup>

#### **4.3 TOPOGRAPHICAL UNFEASIBILITY:**

The North Eastern region of India is not suitable for mega dams from the dimension of geographical location. The entire region is located in a fragile geographical position (seismic zone -5) which itself expresses the risk factor that the downstream communities shoulder. There is every possibility that powerful earthquakes may destroy the structure of river dams resulting in uncontrolled release of water from the big reservoirs. Consequently, flash flood may bring unprecedented danger to the downstream inhabitants. The north east India is known for its large variety of flora and fauna. The consequence of flood will result in sedimentation of rivers which in turn will collapse rich collection of flora and fauna in this region.<sup>6</sup>

It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MOFE) to conduct an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) before construction of any mega dam project but Environmentalists have found that these reports have been inaccurate and misleading.

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<sup>4</sup>Goswami, D.C. and Das, P. J (2003) “*The Brahmaputra river, India*” in *The Ecologist Asia*” Vol -11. Pp 9-14

<sup>5</sup>Sharma, Chandan Kumar (2018) “Dam, Development and Popular Resistance in North East India”, published in SAGE journal, volume. 67.

<sup>6</sup>Dutta, AkhilRanjan(2011), ‘*Political Theory: Issues, Concepts and Debates*’ (edited), ArunPrakashan, Guwahati, P. 226.

For example, the EIA report for the Siyom project only lists out 5 bird species in the region which in reality has over 300 species.<sup>7</sup> Such Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is mandatory before starting of any project but the project implementing agency like NHPC, NEEPCO, Brahmaputra Board, etc. always conduct such EIA when the project is either under construction or in nearing completion. In order to get favourable reports, the dam authorities always conduct such survey with 7 km downstream, whereas according to the regulations, such survey needs to be conducted within minimum 100 km downstream.

The large dams do block not only rivers but also the path through which sedimentation and other nutrients go to the downstream regions. This path blockage will invariably bring the negative outcome not only for agriculture but also for other livelihood mechanisms like fisheries, driftwood collection, sand and gravel mining, etc.<sup>8</sup>

#### **4.4 DISPLACEMENT AND RESETTLEMENT IN THE NORTH EAST INDIA:**

Experiences gathered from past leads to forecasting capability of human being. The people of North East India had bitter experiences of identity crisis of tribals or indigenous people due to several hydroelectric projects built in different parts of the globe.

In 1962 due to the construction of Kaptai Hydroelectric Dam in Bangladesh on the river of Karnaphuli, around 1,40,000 people belonging to Chakmas and Hajong tribes were uprooted from their ancestral Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). They migrated to the North Eastern states of India, because geographically the North Eastern belt is nearer to CHT.

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<sup>7</sup>Mittal, Devika (2015) '*Dams in North East: For Whom*' published in the online journal "Youth Ki Awaaz".

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>The decade of 1960s was the decade of political turbulence. Both India and Pakistan witnessed a devastating war in 1965. The states of Nagaland and Mizoram witnessed separatist movements. The language movement also started in Assam during this period. Due to these political disturbances, the migrants were settled in the erstwhile North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) by the Government of Assam with the consent of the government of NEFA<sup>10</sup> but with the passage of time the native people of this area started to protest against large scale migration of Chakmas and Hajong tribes. In 1964, the government of India has issued 'valid migration certificate' to around 35,000 Chakmas and 1000 Hajongs but most of them still bear the label of 'stateless refugees'.<sup>11</sup> The Indo-Bangladesh Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace (1972), which is also known as Indira-Mujib Treaty asserted that the Chakmas and Hajongs have legitimate claim to citizenship as they were migrated prior to 1971. In spite of this decision, they were facing severe challenges by the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU).<sup>12</sup> Prior to displacement, each farmer family owned an average six acres of land but in the new relocation sites, they hardly got an average two acres of land. R. R. Devasish in his article **'The Population Programme of 1980s and the Land Rights of the Indigenous People of Chittagong Hill Tracts'** stated that literally there was no job opportunities for Chakmas and Hajongs in the resettlement sites. Though they were encouraged for fishing and horticulture by the government yet due to massive corruption these initiatives

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<sup>9</sup>Baruah, B.P. (2001) 'Ethnicity and National Integration in Bangladesh: The Chittagong Hill Tracts', Har Anand Publication, New Delhi, P.67.

<sup>10</sup> ibid

<sup>11</sup>Chakraborty, Sanatk (2000) "*Chakma and Hajong Refugees of Arunachal Pradesh: Still a 'No Where' People*" in Thomas, C. Joshua's (ed), Dimensions of Displaced People in North-East India, New Delhi, Regency Publication, pp. 162-163.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

became futile. This development induced displacement has threatened regional as well as national security and questioned bilateral relationship between India and Bangladesh.<sup>13</sup>

The north east region consists of two river systems-the Brahmaputra river system and the Barak river system. Both the river systems have been associated with unique cultures, customs, art, history, literature, beliefs, food habits as well as livelihoods of the indigenous people of this part. These two river systems specially the Brahmaputra river system has been centre of attraction not only from political and economic point of view but also from cultural and literal point of view. Bharatratna Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, the legends of Assam, has been written a dozens of songs on Brahmaputra. The river is also known as '*luit*', '*Mahabahu*' or '*Lohityo*'.

The northeastern states have a prolonged history of dam induced displacement much before Central Electric Authority's (CEA) ranking. In the first half of 1960s, the 'Assam State Electricity Board' (ASEB) constructed Umium Hydroelectric Project at Barapani, Shillong. Shillong was the then capital of Assam. This project has submerged a large tract of land and displaced a large number of Khasi tribals from their ancestral land.<sup>14</sup>

The state of Assam has witnessed anti dam protest for the first time in the late 1960s against proposed Pagladiya dam at Thalkuchi village, in the then Nalbari district and presently in the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD). The project site is located near the Indo-Bhutan border. Originally, it was a 'minor flood detention project' for Rs. 12.60 crore on the basis of a report submitted by the Central Water Commission in 1968-71. The Planning Commission of India approved the project as a 'flood control

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<sup>13</sup> Roy Devashish and Halim Sadek (1997) '*The Population Programme of 1980s and the Land Rights of the Indigenous People of Chittagong Hill Tracts*' in Subhir Bhaumik, Meghna Chaudhury, Guhathakurta and Sabsyasachi Basu Roy (eds), "*Living on the Edge: Essays on Chittagong Hill Tracts*", Kathmandu: South Asia Forum for Human Rights.

<sup>14</sup> Hussain, Monirul (2007), '*Interrogating Development: State, Displacement and Popular Resistance in North East India*', SAGE publication, New Delhi, P 60.

project’ at an estimated cost of Rs. 12.80 crore at the price level of 1971-72. Subsequently, the project also included irrigation element and finalized at Rs. 287.86 crore in the price level of 1988-89. The Brahmaputra Board became the implementing agency of the project in 1984-85. The Government of India appointed a committee to study on the potentiality to generate hydroelectricity in the proposed region and the committee submitted the report in November, 1992. On the basis of that report, The Technical Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Water Resources, Government of India gave clean sheet to the project in August 1995. Here we have noticed that the ‘clean sheet’ was given on the basis of the report which has been solely based on technical and economic side without taking into account environmental and social aspect. The Ministry of Environment and Forest gave clearance later on. On 29<sup>th</sup> November, 2000 the then National Democratic Alliance(NDA) government finalized the project at the cost of Rs. 542.90 crore. Therefore, Ms Bijoya Chakraborty regarded it as the ‘Gift of Vajpayee’ to Assam but ironically, in 2004, the cost again raised upto Rs. 1,136 crore.<sup>15</sup> The aims and objectives of the dam are:

- To protect 40,000 hectares of land covering five revenue circles of Nalbari district from flood and erosion.
- To irrigate 54,160 hectares of land covering 154 villages in Nalbari district.
- To generate three megawatt electricity.<sup>16</sup>

The project was expected to be completed by 2007. But the question is why the people of Assam vehemently opposed construction of the dam? The answer is-the social and environmental cost associated with the project which has been totally overlooked by the insensitive project designers and the government. The project will displace the existing

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, P. 132.

<sup>16</sup> Dutta, AkhilRanjan (2003) ‘*Pagladiya Project: Poor Rehabilitation of Oustees*’, published on Economic and Political Weekly, P. 5149.



38 villages and displace more than 5000 families and 50,000 people from their parental land but the resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R) package of the Brahmaputra Board covers only 3,271 families and 18,473 people. Without demarcating any clear criteria, the R&R package excluded some people whether they too belong to the same area with those who are included within the R&R package. Hence, the potential displacees, whether entitlement or non entitlement, rejected the R&R package completely. The project will acquire about 34,000 acres fertile agricultural land. As the most of the potential displace families belong to peasant fraternity, acquisition of huge tract of fertile land will invariably bring threat towards their lives and livelihoods. Along with the individual property land, the project will submerge 4 high schools, 13 middle schools, 40 primary schools and several primary health care centres, temples, *Naamghars* and other places of worship but the R&R package includes no high school, 3 middle schools and 7 primary schools. The total 8,000 bighas of land has been allotted by the Government of Assam to resettle the potential displaced people. Unfortunately, the relocation site has already been occupied by the East Pakistan refugees. In a densely populated district, the task of resettling a huge number of people at one location is a hercules task. Due to the absence of vacant land in the plains the government is bound to resettle them into different places which will invariably lead to fragmentation of community life styles. Apart from quantum of land the people are skeptical about the quality of land too, because land is the backbone primarily for the peasants.<sup>17</sup> There are some another dimensions. In the R&R package, only 0.13 hectors or 1 bigha of land has been assigned to each family as homestead land but the village people mostly depend on cattle economy. They need cowshed for raising their cows. They need farms for maintain pigs, goats, poultry or dairy. The R&R package is silent in this matter. While the government

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<sup>17</sup> Hussain, Monirul (2007), *‘Interrogating Development: State, Displacement and Popular Resistance in North East India’*, SAGE publication, New Delhi, pp: 133-134.

conceived the project as ‘flood control project’ the harsh reality is that the project site is not flood-prone area. Besides it is a very fertile area. Therefore people questioned transparency of the project. They have also apprehension about their future- i.e. what will happen if they will be pushed into another flood prone area in the name of ‘flood control project’.<sup>18</sup> Since most of the potential displaced are tribal people, particularly *Bodos*, many of them lacked legal title to land (*myadi patta*) and hence accelerated their apprehension of ‘no compensation’. A people’s resistance committee, known as ‘Pagladiya Bandh Pratirodh Committee’ was formed in 1968-69 under the chairmanship of Mukundaram Medhi during the time of the first investigation for the dam. This protest movement is very significant because it was conducted just after two decades of independence, when the mega dam projects were worshiped or regarded as ‘temples of development’ and that too by those people, mostly illiterate lived in the peripheral region of the country. The AGP put pressure on the Government of India to continue the project in 1987. In the same year, the potential displacees formed an organization, titled, ‘Pagladiya Bandh Prokalpar Khatigrasta Alekar Sangram Samitee’ to give an organizational shape to their movement. Since the project site is mostly dominated by Bodos, the resistance movement was fully supported by the All Bodo Students’ Union (henceforth ABSU). Now this whole area comes under the jurisdiction of Bodoland Territorial Autonomus District (BTAD). On 29<sup>th</sup> October 2002, thousands of villagers came to Dispur, the capital of Assam to demonstrate their *Dharna* peacefully, but they were not allowed to enter into the city. Their entry was being restricted at Amingaon by the police forces through the means of *lathicharge* and tear gas. However, some elite tribal leaders managed to take part in the *Dharna* including activists of ABSU, All Bodo Employees’ Federation (ABEF), All Rabha Students’ Union (ARSU) and MPs and

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<sup>18</sup>Dutta, AkhilRanjan (2003) ‘*Pagladiya Project: Poor Rehabilitation of Oustees*’, published on Economic and Political Weekly, P. 5152.

MLAs of Bodoland Demand Legislative Party. On 17<sup>th</sup> September, 2002 people protested against poor quality of model house being built by the Brahmaputra House. The Board allotted Rs 12,462 for each model house but the constructed one would never cost more than Rs. 3000. The widespread corruption made people frustrated at the project implementing agency.<sup>19</sup> Prof. Manirul Hussain in his book “Interrogating Development: State, Displacement and Popular Resistance in North East India” himself quoted:

*“From my field visit, I found that the houses of even the poorest sections of the people in the proposed project area were far better than the model R&R house in terms of quality and bigger in terms of size. The people said that such houses were absolutely inadequate to accommodate even a small family properly.”<sup>20</sup>*

The protesters were dominated by the police with brutality. However, the main battle against the dam took place from 29<sup>th</sup> January to 4<sup>th</sup> March, 2004. On 29<sup>th</sup> January 2004, officers from the Brahmaputra Board arrived at the project site i.e. Thalkuchi village to do land survey. The potential displacees consisting of around 6,000 families and 40,000-50,000 people blocked all roads and restricted the entry of the officials. The government officials first tried to convince them and when they failed to do so they threatened the people with dire consequences but the protesters remained in their own position. On the next day, i.e. 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2004 the police started blank firing to scare them away and detained a few leaders of the resistance movement in the camp and tried to transport them to the district headquarters at Nalbari in a police vehicle. People stopped the vehicle from moving and pressurized the police into releasing them all. After 35 days of

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<sup>19</sup> Hussain, Monirul (2007), ‘Interrogating Development: State, Displacement and Popular Resistance in North East India’, SAGE publication, New Delhi, pp: 135-139.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, P. 139.

face to face confrontation, the government officials and the police had to go back without completing land survey. This was a big victory for the ‘voiceless people’ and a great loss for the ‘all powerful state’. The two NGOs, namely-Assam Council for People’s Action and *Manab Seva Sangh* had been created by the Brahmaputra Board to convince people. On 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 2002 a meeting was held between the Brahmaputra Board and the members of these two NGOs. A co-ordination committee was formed subsequently. In fact, a list of contractors was also prepared in the meeting for the construction purpose but the leaders of the movement cautioned the people against such fake NGOs. Both the NGOs failed in their target in front of the people’s ‘uniformly united resistance’. Due to the lack of any prominent elite leader, the movement did not get adequate media coverage. Only few Assamese dailies have covered the protest movement of 29<sup>th</sup> & 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2004. No national media came forward to telecast the issue but the government is still trying to revive the project. It is still a part of the state agenda. <sup>21</sup>

The realization of dam induced environmental and social hazards has been felt by people from the 21<sup>st</sup> century onwards especially in the northeastern states. Prior to it, dams have been considered as ‘*temples of development*’. Hence, in 1988, Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), the first regional party government of Assam has demanded a memorandum to the then Prime Minister of India demanding several multipurpose hydel projects for this region in order to control floods to a greater extent as well as to generate cheap hydroelectric power for the whole northeastern region. But subsequently AGP has changed its position when Government of India has come up with a number of mega hydropower projects for this region in 2001.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, pp: 139-143.

<sup>22</sup> Sharma, Chandan Kumar (2018) “Dam, Development and Popular Resistance in North East India”, published in SAGE journal, volume. 67.

Another controversial mega dam project of the region is Karbi Langpi Hydroelectric Project which was completed in 2007. The dam site was located in the hilly Karbi Anglong district in Assam as well as over the river Barapani. The dam is expected to generate 100 MW power for the region. The dam was commissioned in 1979 and it took 28 long years for completion. Initially, the cost of the project was estimated at Rs. 173.69 crore, but it went up by more than double till the time of completion. Being located at the high altitude of Baithalangso under Hamren subdivision in west Karbi Anglong, the dam is posing a serious threat to the local population due to the massive soil erosion in the catchment area of the main feeder. They blame the Forest department (Hamren division) for not taking up large-scale plantation and conservative measures in the catchment of the river before actual commissioning of the project, although crores of rupees were allocated by the Power sector to the Forest department. The indigenous people have directly blamed the Assam State Electricity Board for being corrupt, non transparent, non accountable as well as inefficient.<sup>23</sup>

For Karbi Langpi Hydro electric project, 1607.06 acres of land has been acquired. By official count, the project displaced none and deprived 462 of 1,607 acres. The official files mark everyone as Project Affected People. Though the project files mention rehabilitation, the reality is weak because most tribal Common Property Resources were treated as state property so fewer than 20% were resettled by the project.<sup>24</sup> The Displaced People or Project Affected Peoples of Karbi Langpi came to know about the dam from project officials when they were already measuring their land. The state made no effort to give them the information in a manner that could have prepared them for the eventuality of livelihood loss. Walter Fernandes and Gita Bharali in their book ‘Uprooted

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<sup>23</sup> The Assam Tribune(2014, September 10) Karbi Langpi Dam Posing Threat to Public.

<sup>24</sup> Deputy Commissioner, Karbi Anglong, File No. LAC-7/79, date 18<sup>th</sup> July 1979, Karbi Langpi Hydro Electric Project, Diphu: LAQ Office, District Collectorate, P. 222.

for Whose Benefit? Development Induced Displacement in Assam 1947-2000' talked about their extensive field visit to the project site. Ms Rohila Rangpi who lost her land to Karbi Langpi told them that illiterate persons like her know nothing about it till the project staff came to her house to destroy it. Her husband was ill when the project officials destroyed her house but they paid no heed to him. Thus most DP/PAPs got the information much after the project had been announced, when the initial work had begun. The project officials gave them no information through an official communication. The radio, newspapers or notifications can give the people the news about the project but very often the notification is published in the national English dailies or regional language papers to which the villagers do not have access, both because of the distance and the language.<sup>25</sup>

An Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the then Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh Mukut Mithi and the NHPC in 2000 to construct a series of hydroelectric projects. The Upper, East and West Siang districts were chosen for dam construction sites. The Upper Siang Project will be the 'largest hydroelectric project' in India with the target to generate 11,000 MW of electricity and with the height of 257 metres. Both the state and project designers did not even bother to think about the potential displaces within the crazy race of producing maximum power. In front of the 11,000 MW of power, the fact of potential displacement of 200 villages by the Upper Siang Project will become irrelevant for the government. These series of mega dam projects will displace about 2 lakhs tribal indigenous people from their ancestral land, blocked their access to the common property resources as well as virtually collapsed their age old community lifestyles.

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<sup>25</sup> Fernandes, Walter & Bharali, Gita (2011) 'Uprooted for Whose Benefit? Development Induced Displacement in Assam 1947-2000', North Eastern Social Research Centre, Guwahati, pp: 253-266.

The state of Assam has witnessed peoples' strongly organized resistance against dam construction for the first time at Bihpuria in the Lakhimpur district in 2002. The protest was against proposed 405 Megawatt (MW) hydroelectric power on river Ranganadi. In spite of the governments' assurance, peoples' apprehension proved correct as the whole North Lakhimpur town has been flooded by the excess water released from the Ranganadi during the peak of the summer on 14 June 2008. Since then onwards, every monsoon has been flooded by the water released from the Ranganadi project.<sup>26</sup>

Apart from Lower Subansiri Hydropower Project, other dams like Karbi Langpi, Kapili and Umtru are major reasons behind the regular floods in the districts of Morigaon and Nagaon in Assam. Recently, we hear the news of flash flood in the districts of Golaghat, Assam caused by the excess water released by 75 MW Doyang Hydroelectric Project in Nagaland.<sup>27</sup> The whole region is based on agrarian economy. Therefore, literally, every flood takes away people's means of livelihood which made the non-skilled indigenous people to migrate into different states of India. Being predominantly illiterate, non skilled, backward they come to know as 'cheap labourers.' These people do not come within the ambit of government's compensation or rehabilitation package, because they are not the direct victims of 'displacement'.

In many instances the dam builders or project implementing agency not only hide necessary information from the people but also provide misinformation about the project. They tend to glorify mega dam projects in the northeast on the logic of 'small displacement' as northeastern region has low density of population in compared to other

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<sup>26</sup> The Assam Tribune (2017, July 11). Dam-induced flood & nature's fury devastate North Lakhimpur. The Assam Tribune. Retrieved from <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?Id=jul1117/state050>

<sup>27</sup> Sharma, Chandan Kumar (2018) "Dam, Development and Popular Resistance in North East India", published in SAGE journal, volume. 67. P.6

parts of the country<sup>28</sup> but this logic has created numerous other problems. For example, *Jhum* cultivation requires large plots of land. Hence, submerge of land will invariably put pressure not only on the existing land but also the people who are solely dependent on *Jhum* cultivation.<sup>29</sup>

The 3,000 MW Dibang Dam, the sole multipurpose hydel project to come up in Arunachal Pradesh, will alone result in submergence of an area of 3,560 hectares. The land acquisition for the project is going to displace 115 families in five villages and affect 744 families in another thirty-nine villages.<sup>30</sup> Another mega dam in the district of Lohit, Arunachal Pradesh, i.e. Demwe mega dam which has 1750 MW installed capacity, poses a great threat towards the very existence of Parasuram Kund, a must visited holy site for the Hindus. It is worshiped by the Hindus as the birth place of the mighty river Brahmaputra. Apart from the religious significance, the site attracts a large number of tourists from different parts of the globe.

While on the one hand these series of mega dam projects make local people to migrate into other parts of the country in order to seek jobs or livelihood opportunities, on the other hand promotes entry to immigrant labourers for constructing the dams. It will change the existing demographic structure of the hills. The tribal people are very much skeptical to ‘outsiders’. In the words of a people belong to Idu Mishmis tribe—

*“We have been given constitutional and legal protection, particularly with respect to our land rights and restricted entry of outsiders. 17 large projects in the Dibang Valley will bring in outside labour upwards of 1,50,000 people for long periods as these are long gestation projects. We are concerned about the*

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid,P. 7

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Goswami, R(2015, June 1). Dibang roadblocks remain. The Telegraph, Guwahati, P.1.



*demographic changes and other socio cultural impacts associated with this as the Idu Mishmis are only 9,500 in number. The development policies are a glaring contradiction to the constitutional and legal protection we have been given.”*<sup>31</sup>

Amidst enormous public protests the Government of Assam appointed an expert committee in order to assess downstream impact of the Lower Subansiri Hydropower Project in 2008. The Government of Assam asserted that it would follow expert committee’s recommendations accordingly. In the meanwhile, the Government of Assam has also constituted a committee consisting of members of Assam Legislative Assembly. Both the committees asked NHPC not to proceed further unless and until final report has come but neither NHPC nor Government of Assam listens to it. When the final report was submitted in August 2010 the Government of Assam immediately withdrew its earlier position and called for an ‘international expert team’ as the final report of the expert committee questioned selection of the dam site as well as its downstream effects. In other words, the government has tried to ‘buy’ experts in order to publish reports in favour of the government. This whole phenomenon has been described as ‘politics of expertise’ by renowned social scientist Sanjib Baruah.<sup>32</sup>

On 19 September 2010, Jairam Ramesh, the then union minister of Environment and Forest came to Guwahati to interact with the civil society organizations and NGOs of both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh as well as to listen their agony and atrocity<sup>33</sup> but neither NHPC nor the government took peoples’ agony and atrocity seriously. The protesters were annoyed with this negligence attitude of both the government as well as

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<sup>31</sup>Vagholikar, N., & Das, P. J. (2010). Damming northeast India. Pune/Guwahati: Kalpavriksh, Aaranyak and Action Aid India. P. 7.

<sup>32</sup> Baruah, Sanjib (2012, January 22). Lower Subansiri and the politics of expertise. The Assam Tribune, P.4.

<sup>33</sup> Tiwari, R. (2010, October 8). In note to PM, Jairam takes on Govt, puts question marks on NE projects. The Indian Express. P. 1,4.

the project implementing agency. Hence, civil society organizations and NGOs of both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh such as KMSS, AJYCP, All Mising Students' Union blocked the National Highway 52 in order to prevent all materials to the dam site. Therefore the construction has been stopped since December 2011. Although NHPC maintained that they took all necessary measures to ensure safety of the dam and that the apprehensions raised by the expert committee were unfounded, the members of the expert committee rejected NHPC claims.<sup>34</sup>

Another controversial project was Lower Siang Hydropower Project which was expected to generate 2,700 MW of electricity. The dam is located in the East Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. The dam will bring threat towards the cultures and livelihoods of the indigenous Adi people. Although anti dam movements are generally based on purely Gandhian non violence method but this movement took violent shape. Due to violence occurred, the government has cancelled a number of public hearings on April 2012 in both East and West Siang districts.<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile, after the new Bharatiya Janata Party-led Union government assumed power in Delhi in May 2014, it adopted a policy to fast track the necessary forest and environmental clearance process of many development projects throughout the country. Under this policy, the FAC met twice on 22 and 23 September 2014 and cleared the Dibang Hydel Project despite opposition from within it. This led local activists to accuse the Government of India of bulldozing local concerns. They accused the dam builders of corrupting the small local communities with promise of financial compensation. That is why, they argued, there was no visible public protest after the September clearance of Dibang Hydel Project. It has been pointed out that the dam will submerge 4,577.84

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<sup>34</sup> Amar Asom. (2012a, January 17). Pratibedonar stithit atal asomar bisheshagna samiti [The Assam expert committee sticks to its report]. Amar Asom, pp. 1, 8.

<sup>35</sup> Amar Asom (2012b April 19). Arunachalat Hinsatmak Rup Loise Nadibandh Birodhi Andolone [Anti-dam movement assumes violent form in Arunachal], P. 1,8.

hectares of biodiversity rich forest area with several endemic species in Arunachal Pradesh, and will entail severe impact in downstream areas, primarily in Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, a rich biodiversity hotspot in Assam. However, six years after its foundation stone was laid and twice denied environmental clearance, the 3,000 MW dam was cleared by the FAC, subject to a reduction in the dam height by 20 m from the originally envisaged 288 m. This clearance for India's largest hydro-project and the world's tallest concrete gravity dam came allegedly after a letter on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2014 from the prime minister's office to the secretary of MoEF to 'clear the project expeditiously'. Incidentally, of the six FAC members who cleared the project, four were also part of the panel that had unanimously rejected the project in April 2014.<sup>36</sup>

Thus it was seen that the whole issue of dam construction is a politically driven issue. Before the 2014 general election all the top leaders of BJP like Narendra Modi, Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh, Sushma Swaraj, etc vehemently opposed construction of mega dams specially in the northeastern parts of India but as they assume power, their words take a u-turn. Similarly, in September 2015 The Arunachal Time reported that EAC gave green signal to a number of hydroelectric projects in the Tawang valley of Arunachal Pradesh, including 'Mago Chu, Nykcharong Chu and New Melling'. It was the same EAC who rejected the last three dams just before three months. EAC has also given clean sheet to twenty eight river dams on the Subansiri river basin.<sup>37</sup>

In order to convince the uprooted people or tend to glorify the projects the government makes promises of better infrastructure facilities in the relocation sites but all such promises go in futile. The basic requirements of life, such as, schools, hospitals, houses

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<sup>36</sup> Sharma, Chandan Kumar (2018) "Dam, Development and Popular Resistance in North East India", published in SAGE journal, volume. 67, pp 11-12.

<sup>37</sup> The Arunachal Times. (2015, September 15). Massive clearance spree of Arunachal hydro power projects. The Arunachal Times. Retrieved from <http://www.nelive.in/arunachal-pradesh/news/massive-clearance-spre-arunachal-hydro-power-projects>.

etc. were provided with such a poor infrastructure that people bound to leave relocation sites. The Ranagadi Hydroelectric Project in Arunachal Pradesh which has failed to generate its estimate electricity of 172.4 MW, also failed in providing free electricity to the uprooted people.<sup>38</sup>

The state of Tripura has to bear the pain of both development induced displacement and partition induced Hindu-Bengali refugees. The Dumber Hydroelectric Project (DHP), which was commissioned in the year 1974 displaced an estimated 8000 tribal families and approximately 40,000 people from the project site. For a small state like Tripura, 40,000 people is a large number. Most of them deprived of compensation and the government forced them to resettle in the uphill areas. For a refugee prone state the acquisition of large tract of agricultural land from the indigenous tribal people is a blunder in reality. However, the project failed to generate the targeted amount of power. In such as situation there was no point to bear undue burden, hence, demands for decommission the project become tantamount. The present situation of the DHP is very disheartening. A BBC East India correspondent on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2007 reported that hundreds of indigenous tribes in Tripura flocked to reclaim the lands emerging from the dam's reservoir after a sharp drop in the water level there. The Tripura Police chased them away from the waterless reservoir. The CPI (M) government did not allow anybody to resettle there and also acknowledged the fact of non-continuity of power generation since mid-March 2007 due to the siltation and its consequent rise in the bed of the reservoir. Most of the tribal are demanding for reclaiming the land and redistributed them among 25,000 landless marginalized tribal peasants.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Chowdhury, Arnab Roy & Kipgen, Ngamjahao(2013) 'Deluge Amidst Conflict: Hydropower Development and Displacement in the North East Region of India' published in the "Progress in Development Studies" .P.202

<sup>39</sup> Hussain, Monirul (2007), '*Interrogating Development: State, Displacement and Popular Resistance in North East India*', SAGE publication, New Delhi, P 30-31.

The northeastern state of Manipur has been facing anti dam protest against proposed 1,500 MW Tipaimukh Mutlti Purpose Project which is in the pipeline since 1995. The project will fully submerge 16 villages along with the existing National Highway 52. The project will displace around 15,000 tribal people from their ancestral land. The worst victims will be the Hmars and Zeliangrong Nagas. The people from all sections like, the civil society organizations, the NGOs, academicians as well as the victims have been started protest under the banner of ‘Committee Against Tipaimukh Dam’ (CATD) since early 1990s. As a direct victim, the state of Manipur also expressed its apprehension as well as grievances against the dam. In fact, the State Legislative Assembly of Manipur also expressed its apprehension twice-in 1995 & 1998. But we can clearly see the turnaround of the government as Mr. O. Ibobi Singh, the then Chief Minister of Manipur declared to go hand in hand with the project and also signed an Memorandum of Understanding with the NEEPCO, the project implementing agency in 2003.<sup>40</sup>

We can understand the tribal people’s emotional bonding with their ancestral land and the intensity of fear for losing them from the following quote:

*“The Zeilangrong people who live in these areas, like any other tribal people, do not lead an individualized commodity governed life but live in a well-knit web of community life. Their ancestral bonds to their land-the mother earth, constitute their cultural and psychological frame of mind that cannot be compromised or negotiated. The submergence of the Ahu (Barak) waterfalls, the biggest and most beautiful natural gift in Manipur, will destroy an important aspect of their heritage-the innumerable myths and legends which are an inalienable part of their bank of memories*

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid,pp: 126-130.

*inherited through centuries. The high watermark of the dam will also destroy the five most important lakes located just above the Ahu waterfalls where the magical swords of Jadonang, the national hero of Nagas, is believed to be hidden. All these priceless and inalienable part of their cultural heritage cannot be left to the mindless destruction by dam project authorities.”-----Ms Aram Pamie, the Secretary of the Naga Women Association, Manipur.*<sup>41</sup>

The new member of the northeast, i.e, Sikkim has also witnessed anti dam protests in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The indigenous people of Sikkim, specially, Bhutias, Lepchas and Buddhist monks opposed vehemently against construction of Rathongchu Hydroelectric project and threatened to burn their holy text, i.e. ‘gnas bsol’ unless and until the project was suspended. They went to the High Court and Supreme Court too. Finally their efforts have been recognized and the project was finally suspended in 2002.<sup>42</sup> On 20<sup>th</sup> June 2007, Sikkim has witnessed one of the largest anti dam movements under the banner of ‘Affected Citizens of Teesta’ (ACT). Their demand was to stop all hydroelectric projects proposed for Dzongu as well as others in the northern Sikkim. As a mode of Gandhian Protest, they went for hunger strike unless and until their demand will not be fulfilled. The hunger strike was cancelled in 2009 as eight hydroelectric projects were being demolished.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Pamei Aram (2001), ‘Havoc on Tipaimukh High Dam Project’, Economic and Political Weekly. Vol. XXXVI, No.13, 31<sup>st</sup> March-6<sup>th</sup> April 2001,pp: 1054.

<sup>42</sup> Chowdhury, Arnab Roy & Kipgen, Ngamjahao(2013) ‘Deluge Amidst Conflict: Hydropower Development and Displacement in the North East Region of India’ published in the “Progress in Development Studies” .P.205.

<sup>43</sup> Lepcha, Kachyo (2018) ‘Can the Movement Against Hydropower Projects in Sikkim be Reactivated?’ published in Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 53, Issue No. 25, 23 June 2018

## PART II:

### 4.5 DISPLACEMENT AND REHABILITATION IN LOWER SUBANSIRI

#### HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT:

Prior to 2001 that means before the Brahmaputra river basin has been awarded highest marks for potentiality to generate hydroelectric power, people of Assam started to hear the news of 2,000 MW Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Project (LSHEP) at Gerukamukh under National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC). Gerukamukh was located in Dhemaji district of Assam and also Assam–Arunachal Pradesh foothills in the lower part of the river Subansiri.<sup>44</sup> The 90% of the project area comes under Arunachal Pradesh and only the remaining 10% comes within the territory of Assam. The total requirement of forest land is 4039.3 hectares, out of which 3183 hectares are in Arunachal Pradesh and 856.3 hectares are in Assam. The expected height of the dam was 116 metres. We can make a list of submergence of land from various forest divisions as follows:

Title 4.2: The potential submergence of forest lands by the Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Project

Name(s) of the Forest Division(s)	Amount of Submerged Land(in hectares)
Banderdewa Forest Division	508
Hapoli Forest Division	980
Along Forest Division	1225
Daparijo Forest Division	358
Dhemaji Forest Division	365
Source: Hussain, Monirul (2007), <i>Interrogating Development: State, Displacement and Popular Resistance in North East India</i> , SAGE publication, New Delhi, P 116.	

<sup>44</sup>Sharma, Chandan Kumar (2018) “Dam, Development and Popular Resistance in North East India”, published in SAGE journal, volume. 67.

Both the governments and NHPC underestimated not only social aspects but also environmental issues. The northeastern region is well known for its rich biodiversity all over the globe. Arunachal Pradesh has recognized as World's second cultural biodiversity hotspot. But the NHPC has nothing to do with the protection of natural resources in the region. Therefore, in spite of continuous warnings by the 'threatened people,' the natural elephant corridor i.e. 'Dulung Elephant Corridor' that came between Assam-Arunachal Pradesh foothills was being blocked by the NHPC in the name of constructing the dam which resulted into conflict between men and elephants. In many instances, 'minor displacement' rationalizes the whole discourse of displacement in the northeastern states where population density was too low but in spite of having lowest density of population in the country, the LSHP will displace around 8,000 people only in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. The NHPC has neither time nor interest to deal with these issues. It is neither transparent nor accountable to the people. It left the 'project affected people' not only with no information but also with misinformation. Although the NHPC claimed that they were constructing the dam with the ability to withstand any earthquake having an intensity of 10 on the Richter scale, yet the people refused to convince! Along with the common people, the then Governor of Assam also expressed his apprehension regarding LSHP. Apart from the common masses, NHPC kept also the governments of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh under 'veil of ignorance' on various aspects of the LSHP. The local people condemned NHPC for not showing respect towards their cultural and religious beliefs.<sup>45</sup> *The Assam Tribune*, on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2005, had

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<sup>45</sup> Hussain, Monirul (2007), 'Interrogating Development: State, Displacement and Popular Resistance in North East India', SAGE publication, New Delhi, P 116-122.



reported the demolition of an old *Naamghar* and an ancient holy site of elephant worship at Geruka Nalah without prior consent of the local people.<sup>46</sup>

In the beginning the Government of Assam was going to start the project without conducting public hearings on environmental clearance. Subsequently with the pressure from civil society organizations like 'All Assam Students' Union' (AASU) and 'Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad' (AJYCP) the government was bound to conduct a public hearing on 14 September 2001 but the public hearing was not transparent at all. The Assam State Pollution Control Board made a power point presentation on Hindi and English endorsing the project and presented it before indigenous Assamese and Mishing people which were mostly either semi literate or illiterate. Thus the government has collected signatures from the indigenous local people on the resolution for the project. The project site is known for its rich forest resources consisting both Subansiri and Dulung Reserved Forests. But according to the experts like Prof. Dulal Goswami, no extensive environmental impact assessment has been conducted in this regard and the Government of Assam has submitted its 'narrow' environmental clearance report to the Government of India.<sup>47</sup> In fact the orders of the Supreme Court of India (SCI) have also been violated in many instances. For example, in an order on 19 April 2004, the SCI imposed conditions that, among other things, 'the NHPC would also ensure that there was no siltation down the Subansiri during the construction phase...'and that 'under no circumstances, the excavated material would be dumped either in the river or any other

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<sup>46</sup> Staff Reporter (2005), 'Naamghar Destruction by NHPC Condemned', The Assam Tribune, 9<sup>th</sup> April 2005.

<sup>47</sup>Vagholikar, N., & Ahmed, M. F. (2003). Tracking a hydel project: The story of lower subansiri. Ecologist Asia, 11(1), P.30.

part of the national park/sanctuary or the surrounding forests...' Yet, local communities have reported 'indiscriminate dumping of muck and debris in the river' since 2004.<sup>48</sup>

Along with AASU and AJYCP, another civil society organization of Assam, i.e. 'Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti' (KMSS) has entered into the scenario in the year 2005. They all have been taking bold steps to accelerate anti dam movements in the region from time to time.

The Arunachal Pradesh government was very much skeptical about the project and they had warned the NHPC too. The Power Secretary of Arunachal Pradesh had sent two letters in January and March of 2005 to the Chairman and Managing Director of NHPC pointing out 'serious procedural lapses'. It was clearly mentioned in these letters that NHPC had started the project without prior approval from the Arunachal Pradesh government.<sup>49</sup>

The project implementing agency NHPC identified 77 people as Project Affected People. According to them, all 77 project affected people belong to ST community from two villages namely, Gengi and Siberite in West Siang district in Arunachal Pradesh.

The survey of the Gengi village of Likabali Sub-division of West Siang District reveals that two villages of Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh, viz; Gangi and Nsiberite, have been severely affected by the dam. According to the researcher Dr. Pallavi Hazarika, 116 families consisting of 1094 people in these two villages are severely affected. Amongst 116 families, 29 lost agricultural land while their homestead remains untouched. A total of 1225 hectares of private land have been acquired which made the affected people to move to other villages far away from their original village.

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<sup>48</sup> Vagholikar, N., & Das, P.J. (2010) 'Damming Northeast India', Pune/Guwahati: Kalpavrisht, Aaranyak and Action Aid India, P.16.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

The river Subansiri is their lifeline. Their entire lifestyles-economic as well as cultural revolves around the river. Therefore, it becomes difficult for them to start a new live far away from the river both from financial as well as cultural point of view. It becomes difficult to rely on *Jhum* cultivation and *Paani Kheti*(deep water rice cultivation) and common property resources like bamboos and timber due to acquisition of agricultural and private land.<sup>50</sup>

The government has constructed two resettlement camps, i.e. *Tarap* and *Nsiberite Rijo* for the affected as well as potential affected people of *Gangi* and *Nsiberite* respectively. The government has claimed that these two resettlement camps are well equipped with model schools, electricity, dispensary, sanitation facility, pure drinking water provision, drainage as well as common grazing ground.

There is a divergent of language between the affected people and the NHPC regarding employment. Regarding employment, it is claimed by the respondents that one member from 7-8 out of 77 affected families got employment in the project based on their educational qualification whereas, the Government of Arunachal Pradesh and NHPC authorities claimed that 30/40 local youths were employed in the project through campus interview. Although some of them manage to get job but that too is not in their area of specialization. Some became drivers while others had to engage themselves as day to day wage laborers in the construction site. As a result, they have to start petty business or open shops either in their locality or in the project site from the cash compensation they received from the authority for the land in order to feed themselves.<sup>51</sup>

The Adi community of Arunachal Pradesh has vehemently opposed the construction of dam as the dam has submerged their 570 hectares of ancestral land and forced them to

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<sup>50</sup> Hazarika, Dr. Pallavi(2017) 'Internal Displacement in Arunachal Pradesh' published in International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research, Volume.3, Issue 2, pp: 13-14.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

move to plains of Assam. In the research article ‘Internal Displacement in Arunachal Pradesh’, the researcher Dr. Pallavi Hazarika narrated her talk to the village Headman of the Adi village, Durpai Dasi Gaon where he told that due to lack of permanent rehabilitation site the entire Adi people had to move from place to place in search for better livelihood opportunity which deprived them from getting any kind of legal compensation from the government.<sup>52</sup>

A report was submitted to the Planning Commission in July 2014 by a technical experts’ committee questioning the safety of the LSHP on the Subansiri River. C D Thatte and M S Reddy, former bureaucrats with the ministry of water resources authored the report in which they stated that the present planning of the project ignores the flood control aspect of the dam besides compromising the dam's design and safety. The report also suggests that the very foundation on which the dam rests, might be weak. The sandstone, which really looks and behaves like a sand rock, on which the dam is founded, has all through the SLP planning considered very weak. Its adequacy and competence to support the concrete gravity dam is not established satisfactorily, it states. But in spite of RTI queries filed by environmental activists Rohit Choudhary and Neeraj Vaghlikar the Planning Commission declined to make the report public.<sup>53</sup>

#### **4.6 CONCLUSION:**

From the above discussions one thing becomes very clear that neither the project designers nor the policy makers follow Impoverishment Risk and Reconstruction Model (henceforth IRR) in the northeastern context. Due to holistic, flexible and operational implications the IRR model has been followed by the project implementing agency all

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid,P.14.

<sup>53</sup> Chakrabartty, Anupam & Dutta, Arnab Pratim (2015) ‘Subansiri Dam Unsafe: Experts Committee’, published in Down to Earth.

over the world. But in the northeastern states of the country, due to the wide spread corruption, neither the government nor the project implementing agency do not feel any necessity to go for IRR model. Instead of adopting a holistic IRR model they put emphasis on technical or mechanistic approach in order to complete the projects as early as possible.

In a region like northeast which is mostly dominated by the tribal, the IRR model is the most suitable one as it addresses social, economic, political, cultural as well as psychological needs and grievances of the indigenous tribal society. The tribals are the worst victims of the development paradigm as in India 40 to 50% of those displaced by development projects were tribal people, who accounts for just 8% of the 1 billion.<sup>54</sup> Their identity has been very much attached with their ancestral land and they have developed a close emotional and spiritual bond with it. Their very basic existence rely on forest and forest products like fruits, fuel, fodder and fiber. Their livelihoods depend on fishing, shifting cultivation (*jhum*) and hunting. In many instances these tribal people do not even have formal rights or legal rights to the area on which their daily survival is connected. Due to the lack of legal title to land (*myadi patta*) the tribal people often deprived of compensation from the government. Being predominantly poor, illiterate, ignorant and isolated it becomes very difficult for them to mingle with the new people at new environment. Now-a-days, the government provides cash compensation to the uprooted people due to scarcity of land but the cash compensation makes the illiterate tribal people more impoverished. Still today, many tribal communities in the region are not well accustomed with the market economy. Therefore, they spent the compensation

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<sup>54</sup>Fernandes, Walter (2004) *Dams and Displacement Woes*, The Statesman, 15<sup>th</sup> July 2004.

money in a negative way purchasing unhealthy products.<sup>55</sup> Actually neither the government nor the project implementing agency see compensation as their ethical or moral responsibility rather they take it as their ‘undue responsibility’ and they just want to finish it by any means without taking into consideration about further consequences.

The consequences of not adopting IRR model have disheartening impacts upon the indigenous women. The grievances of the women are unheard not only by the concerned authorities but also the displaced male population. This phenomenon has been called as ‘double bind’ by Lyla Mehta. Before displacement, women had lots of work to do. They were feeding their cattle, picking wood from the forest, working in the agricultural land and had other allied household activities. They were working shoulder to shoulder with their husband.<sup>56</sup> But the displacement makes them either maid or prostitute. Off course, some of them are fortunate enough to find some jobs in the ‘project township’ but they are temporary and low paid. The so called ‘development discourse’ takes these tribal women away from their area of specialization. In addition, women generally do not have legal titles to land. In a patriarchal society like ours, land is registered in the names of the husband or son which deprives women from ‘legal compensation’. Since dams, coals, cement dust and gravels have polluted many rivers and wells, collecting water for the household activities has become a threat for the displaced women. As women are less mobile than men the breakdown of village set becomes a psychological trauma for most of the women.<sup>57</sup> The nation’s ‘development’ disconnects them from their near and dear

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<sup>55</sup>Parajuli, Pramod, (1991), “Power Knowledge in Development Source- New Social Movements and the State in India, *International Social Science Journal*, Feb, P. 180.

<sup>56</sup>Fernandes, Walter (2004) *Dams and Displacement Woes*, The Statesman, 15<sup>th</sup> July 2004.

<sup>57</sup> Thukral, Enakshi Ganguli and Singh, Mridula (1995), ‘*Dams and Displaced in India*’ published in the book “Development, Displacement and Resettlement: Focus on Asian Experiences”, Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, P. 115.

ones. Their cultural practices, religious faiths as well as emotional bonds have submerged along with their ancestral land within the gigantic circle of ‘national development’.

Michael Cernea has not limited the IRR model to cognitive or research purpose only rather it is worshiped due to its ‘operational implications’ all over the world. But our project designers have neither interest nor time to interact with the potential displacees. We have not seen the efforts to transform unfertile hill into ‘flat terraces for horticulture’ and restoring Common Property Resources like water bodies, burial grounds, forested land, etc. There was no plantation at the resettlement site prior to relocation, no mechanism for self employment opportunities, no skill development training for the displaced youths, no better quality of housing materials, no supply of electricity, no clean drinking water, no proper sanitation facility, no free health check up of the displaced and so on and so forth. The civic amenities like schools, temples, naamghars, mosques etc. have been destroyed completely. Therefore, we have seen all eight risks of impoverishment as identified by M. Cernea, i.e. landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalization, food insecurity, increased morbidity and mortality, loss of access to Common Property Resources and social disarticulation.<sup>58</sup>

Probably the project implementing agencies believe that it is easy to convince illiterate, backward and ignorant indigenous tribal people. But now -a -days, people are no longer unquestioning and no one is willing to pay the ‘cost of development’.

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<sup>58</sup> Cernea, Michael (1995) “*Eight Main Risks: Impoverishment and Social Justice in Resettlement*”, World Bank, Environment Department, Washington, D.C., P. 68.