



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY GUWAHATI
PhD-17 SHORT ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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SHORT ABSTRACT

The thesis delves into a central question: in a context of agrarian crises and changing political economy, how do Indigenous rural communities engage with development projects that introduce a new structure of accumulation? It explores the relationship between an Indigenous community and a development project, specifically focusing on the under-construction dam on the Obonori River in the Assam- Arunachal Pradesh border. The community faces numerous threats and is acutely aware of the negative impacts associated with the dam. Nevertheless, a significant portion of those affected by its construction has opted to engage in the construction economy that surrounds it in order to sustain their livelihoods. This situation creates a paradoxical relationship with the dam. The thesis seeks to investigate the implications of this involvement, arguing that the conflicting nature of this relationship stems from individuals' struggles for social reproduction. It posits that indigenous populations, often perceived as strong defenders of their land, may not always align with this image. This reveals a complex and dynamic relationship. Hence, the thesis highlights that these intricacies are influenced by a combination of historical capitalist agrarian change, ecological factors, landlessness, joblessness, aspirations, and growing capitalist relationships within the community. Thus, this thesis critically interrogates the dominant narrative that posits Indigenous populations as uniformly opposed to development projects that jeopardise their territories, water resources, and forests. By advancing our understanding of indigeneity, this research emphasises the necessity of contextualising Indigenous experiences within historical, material, and aspirational frameworks. It critiques the prevalent inclination to uphold simplistic and generalised representations of Indigenous communities, which can contribute to the reinforcement of stereotypes that portray these groups as ahistorical and static. Furthermore, the thesis contests reductionist critiques of indigeneity that seek to undermine and delegitimise the claims and agency of Indigenous communities, often without considering the situated nature of claims that are contingent on historical and material contexts.