

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **'AFFECTIVE' FORMS OF OTHERNESS**

Reference to “the scientific traveller” abound in the literature of this period....The term needs to be understood not only in terms of the contemporary Western passion for scientific inquiry...but also as part of an evolving strategy within colonial epistemology, as an attempt to use direct European observation to supplement or even displace written texts...that had informed and characterized the early Orientalist project. (David Arnold, *The Tropics and the Travelling Gaze* 31)

Before the 1860s...in India, and elsewhere...scientific accounts were presented in the form of journeys, in which narratives of personal experience and the unfolding of nature intersected or were mutually reinforcing. (Arnold 32)

On the literature of the imperial frontier, the conspicuous innocence of the naturalist, I would suggest, acquires meaning in relation to an assumed guilt of conquest, a guilt the naturalist figure eternally tries to escape, and eternally invokes, if only to distance himself from it once again. (Pratt, *Imperial Eyes* 57)

The naturalist’s rhetoric of anti-conquest comes close to taking on the role of an official discourse, aimed at legitimating...British takeover. (Pratt 58)

“‘Affective’ Forms of Otherness,” includes accounts of colonial writers from fields other than the ones discussed in the previous chapters: doctors, engineers, writers, explorers, surveyors, etc. This chapter deals with narratives that do not fit into the scheme adopted in the earlier chapters, given their diverse points of origin and social formation. Being only indirectly connected to the colonial project, these writers enjoyed greater latitude as there was scope for them to record the anthropological and cultural details that caught the eye. Interestingly, writers not directly related to the areas discussed above, create a spectrum of narrative engagement that is akin to what Leela Gandhi calls ‘affective communities.’ It is possible to suggest that free from traditional colonial appendages, men and women look at the ‘other’ as human and subject to human foibles and frailties. While there is no consistent pattern in the presentation of such ‘affective possibilities,’ the fact that this happens is significant. They are individual accounts, carrying ambivalences, yet not totally free of a colonialist underpinning. Further, as contended by David Arnold (in *The Tropics and the Travelling Gaze*), colonial travel narratives on India, however disparate and scientific in nature, were a means of possessing it through Western knowledge systems.

This chapter deals with the accounts written by people from different professional fields who had come to Assam during colonial rule. Some of them were government employees; some came to do surveys as part of some government projects; and, a few of them came as explorers. It may be noted that survey and development work was part of the colonial project. It was while engaged in such work that the officer got the opportunity to take stock of the people and their culture as well as the resources in that region. As pointed out by David Arnold,

“Many an up-country official in this period was engaged in survey and settlement work that not only required him personally to travel extensively, but also placed him at the core of an “ambulatory court,” to which information of various kinds was constantly being relayed and within which it was assembled and collated for onward transmission or subsequent use.” (*Tropics* 30)

Each officer of the British Empire, or even people not directly engaged by the Government as a member of the colonial administration, while travelling in the course of his work had “not only an opportunity of investigating the geological formation, natural history, and productions of the country” but also the chance to examine the history and culture, not to say civilization of places and people along the way (30).

Thus, these people as a group are other than the particular groups of travellers that have been discussed in the previous chapters. Since they were not directly related to the colonialist project, these travellers could enjoy the liberty of expression in their representation of Assam and its people. The texts taken for the study are: Francis Hamilton’s *An Account of Assam* (1820), William Griffith’s *Journals of Travels in Assam, Burma, Bhootan, Afghanistan and the Neighbouring Countires* (1847), Colonel F. T. Pollock’s *Wild Sports of Burma and Assam* (1900), A. C. Newcombe’s *Village, Town, And Jungle Life in India* (1905) and Walter Del Mar’s *The Romantic East* (1906).

Francis Hamilton, also known as Francis Buchanan, was a physician by profession who was appointed by the East India Company to write an account on the region; William Griffith was the botanist who came with the team sent by the Tea Committee to do research on the indigenous nature of the tea plants in Assam; Colonel F. T. Pollock was an engineer who was engaged in the road construction project in colonial Assam; A. C. Newcombe, too, was a civil engineer employed in the Public Works Department in India;

and, Walter Del Mar was a writer as well as explorer. The group, thus, comprises people from different walks of life who happened to visit or know Assam during colonial rule.

The hypotheses for this chapter are:

- i. That the authors were frank and more straight forward while speaking about the traveled region and its people;
- ii. Although they had colonialist instincts, the authors were unlike the other propaganda writers;
- iii. That the statements and remarks about Assam and its people were more specific, depending upon their engagements.

### **Francis Hamilton: A Long and Laborious Survey**

Francis Hamilton's *An Account of Assam* is the only text taken for this study which was published before Assam came under British rule. It is one of the earliest texts written on Assam by a British writer which makes it a very important document. It is a remarkable text on Assam not only because it was written on request of the Company but also because the writer wrote about a place he never had visited and gave comments on its inhabitants whom he had neither seen nor met, all based on numerous surveys, reports, interviews and other available documents and sources. In the introduction, Hamilton declares that the information he collected was from several sources:

The following account was collected during the year 1808 and 1809, partly from several natives of Bengal, who, on different occasions had visited Assam, and partly from natives of that country, who were fugitives in Bengal. (*Account 1*)

Hamilton, despite his efforts, admits that he himself was not certain about the truth value of his claims at times: "The accounts on all points did not agree; nor can I be certain, that I have, on all occasions, been able to select the parts that approached nearest to truth" (1). He very often refers to a Bengali 'brahman' who provided the materials required. This person was in close touch with the palace priest. While writing about Sadiya, he received information from two persons but he himself admits that neither of the informers was reliable as none of them had visited the concerned place. Hamilton's humble submission about him being not certain about the veracity of the claims on certain occasions can be misleading, as it was an extremely well scrutinized and meticulously documented report based on information accumulated with a painstaking eye on detail. This has been

suggested by critics and historians who have examined this work at length. One such critique is offered by Surjya Kumar Bhuyan, who explains in the Preface to Hamilton's book, the laborious nature of the project undertaken (1940).

According to Bhuyan, a scholar of history from Assam:

The Buchanan-Hamilton manuscripts are the result of a long and laborious survey of the districts of Eastern India which formed part of the East India Company's territories or were adjacent. This survey was undertaken in 1808 to 1814 at the instance of the Governor-General in Council. Dr. Francis Buchanan afterwards known as "Francis Hamilton formerly Buchanan," was instructed to extend his enquiries "throughout the whole of the territories, subject to the immediate authority of the Presidency of Fort William." (iv)

It shows that Hamilton did not write that *Account* on a whim. It was the result of long hard work carried out on the directive of the Government. Interestingly, however, Hamilton was asked to prepare that work without visiting the places outside the jurisdiction of the British Government.

As pointed out by Bhuyan, Hamilton was given further directives that

It was also desired, that "you should extend your inquiries to the countries, and to those petty states with which the British Government has no regular intercourse. In performing this duty, however, you are prohibited from quitting the Company's territory and are directed to confine your inquiries to consulting such of the natives of those countries as you may meet with, or natives of the British territories who have visited the countries in question." (v)

Hamilton was expected to work within a certain framework along set parameters. He was also advised to look "into the following subjects—(1) topography, history, antiquities of the country; (2) the condition of the inhabitants, sanitation, costumes, food, medical treatment, education; (3) religions, customs, priests; (4) natural production of the country, animal, vegetable and mineral; (5) agriculture, vegetables, implements of husbandry, manure, measures connected with floods and inundations, domestic animals, fences, farms, landed property, tenure; (6) fine arts and common arts, architecture, sculptures, paintings, markets; (7) commerce, exports and imports, weights and measures, transport by land and water, roads" (vi). These pointers indicate the kind of detailed and structured

report the East India Company expected Hamilton to compile in its third attempt to procure information about Assam. Its earlier attempts in that direction through the persons of Baillie and Welsh (through his correspondence with Shore) had proved to be far from satisfactory.

Company determination apart, Hamilton's report reflects his efforts to be scrupulous in his search for accuracy and clarity. The following comment by Bhuyan confirms what is obvious to every reader of the *Account of Assam*: "Hamilton's love of accuracy, his sense of proportion and his previous experience at compiling topographical and scientific reports have all combined to make his *Account of Assam* a valuable contemporary document" (viii). Not only does Hamilton do as expected, he also makes sure that it does not remain merely history or ethnography or a statistical or economic report from a fact finding mission. The range of topics the work includes is exhaustive and covers different angles.

Hamilton begins his account with an examination of Ahom history in Assam. From coins left from the reigns of various kings Hamilton was able to give a chronology to the succession of kings and their consorts. Interestingly, after the death of King Rudra Singha, his sons succeeded one another till it came to Lakhsmi who had to live through a rebellion which he had somehow managed to crush. He was succeeded by Gaurinath, his son, who according to Hamilton, was the twentieth king and the seventeenth generation of the family since its inception, "The earliest of his coins that I have seen is in 1703 and the latest in 1717" (10). Gaurinath is reported to have been "a weak young man, totally unable to content with the enthusiastic multitude" (10). He was driven out of power and was replaced by a person called Bharat Singha from amongst the rebels. However, as reported by Hamilton,

Gaurinath having thrown himself on the protection of Lord Cornwallis, that nobleman shortly before his departure for Europe in 1793, sent captain Welsh, with 1100 sepoys, who restored Gaurinath to the throne of his ancestors, and after a short stay returned to Bengal very much to the regret of the prince. (11)

Hamilton further reports that

On Captain Welsh's retiring to Bengal, the Bura Gohaing... a man of enterprise, seized on the whole authority of government, and in fact was the only person

among the chiefs of Asam, who seems to have had vigour sufficient for the miserable circumstances, in which the country was placed. He procured soldiers from the west of India, Asamese, as I before said, having become dastards, and with these strangers he compelled the followers of the Mahamari to take refuge either in the company's territory or in the eastern extremity of the kingdom. (11)

This Buragohain took on the role of a chief minister/ counselor and tried to control the monarch and his challengers from time to time. Hamilton mentions the role of the Buragohain because he became a power center with the kings more or less being under his tutelage. This was the state of affairs at the time when Hamilton was asked to make a survey, not through personal visits but through indirect means like accounts, records and first person reports of the situation including topography, history, the living conditions, religious customs, natural resources including cultivation and animal husbandry as well as the state of art and culture and last but not least, commerce and transport in Assam.

The story of the Ahom kings in Hamilton's account provides the backdrop for his report on all these matters as determined by the company authorities. Interestingly, however, Hamilton notes that for superstitious reasons on the advice of royal fortune tellers, there were instances where the king's life being under a stellar cloud, it was left more to the wife of the king to take up the reins of power during the life time of the king. In fact, Hamilton cites coins in the name of Phuleswari, the wife of Siva Singha dated 1646-1648 (AD 1723-25). After the death of Phuleswari in childbirth there were coins in the name of other wives of the king, Pramatheswari, Ambika and Sarweswari during the period from 1652-1666 (AD 1729-1743) who had purportedly succeeded her to the throne. As Hamilton reports, "When one queen died he [the Prince] was merely placed on the throne in order to marry another who might assume the government" (9). These reports of a female monarch lend a different perspective to the status of women at least of high birth in Assam. Most colonial travellers take pains to mention the status of women as subservient to men in Assamese society or in the tribal societies bordering the region. Returning to the story of the royal household, although it was expedient for the queen to actively rule in place of the king, it shows that patriarchal concerns had not been allowed to interfere with questions of succession and governance in the state.

Hamilton informs that he was helped in his project by a survey of the river Brahmaputra by Thomas Wood of the Bengal Engineers. This document is also used by Arrow Smith

in his General Survey of Assam. Hamilton takes the help of Arrow Smith's map of Assam and the river Brahmaputra to ascertain its territory as well as topography. He writes,

Asam proper is higher and of a better soil than Kamrup, and contains few or no hills and woods. It is reckoned that formerly three-fourths of the whole were in full cultivation, and that even now not above 5/16 are waste or unoccupied. (26)

Hamilton offers a detailed account of territories under the control of some prince or monarch or chief in the whole region from copious notes and information gathered from reports, surveys and such documents. He also mentions various military stations that had been established to protect the frontier (prior to the intervention of the British). He next mentions "several jurisdictions established for the purpose of revenue, and totally independent of the governors of the provinces or military commanders of the districts in which they are situated" (41). There were also two crucial points at the frontier of Bengal known as custom houses (chaukis) under the control of two persons called Kamal and Parashuram who were called Boruyas (41-42).

According to Hamilton, these Boruyas who were strategically placed near Goyalpara monitored all the trade and transport of goods from that point and down the river. Although there were seven subordinate custom houses scattered along the river banks, the revenue collection was in the hand of the Boruyas and their custom house. Such was their income that they made an annual payment of forty five thousand rupees to the king. Hamilton observes that "the Boruya may be said to have a complete monopoly, while the whole trade passes through his hands" (42). It was left to European traders to challenge or counter this stranglehold over trade and transport of the Boruyas in Assam.

A good many Europeans both English and foreigners... after having suffered heavy losses by fraud, found that the only proper mode of conducting the business was, to establish a monopoly in opposition to that of the Boruyas; and accordingly they agreed to divide the whole trade into certain shares, which were several times regularly transferred by sale." (42)

However, it transpired that these foreigners were operating independently as they tried to assume some control of the trade in Assam. They managed to divide power and control of the trade between themselves and the Boruyas. However, writes Hamilton, with



Welsh's visit to the Frontier, such practices were disallowed as the European traders were found to be operating without official government backing. For a while the Boruyas revived their monopoly over the trade but Hamilton tries to draw the attention of the authorities in this matter:

I am...persuaded that it would be highly advantageous not only to the revenue but to the people of both countries, were the company to establish a custom house at Goyalpara, under one of their civil servants through whom all the commerce of Assam should be conducted, he himself being most strictly forbidden from trade: but he should supply the Assamese with whatever salt they wanted for ready money at a fixed price, and should receive all their goods into his store; selling them at a fixed price, to whatever Bengalee merchant chose to buy for ready money. (44)

What Hamilton suggests here is regulation of trade between Assam and Bengal through the good offices of the Company. He says as much: "The usual honorable dealing of the Company in mercantile concerns, would restore credit to this commerce, which may become of some importance" (44). Apart from restoring balance and ensuring decent trade, the role of the Company in acting as a regulatory mechanism would prove beneficial in encouraging future trade in this region.

The important point to note is the writer's position when he talks about the resources in the region. Along with other things Hamilton gives detailed information on the trade fields. He comes to know from acquaintances/informers that salt is in great demand in the region and that it is a trade that brings huge profits. He offers a suggestion to the Company that it should build a custom house under a civil servant in Goalpara and conduct the business of salt from there. Hamilton's concern was the profit of the Company which did not even include other colonial people.

Hamilton also throws light on other prospective business fields with his information on different mines and resources. His concern is to highlight the profitable trade fields to the Europeans. The noticeable fact is that although Hamilton is restrained while depicting the native land and its people as in othering the indigenous people, his colonialist 'self' is revealed when he discusses the future prospects of commerce in the region. In fact, the consciousness of a superior colonial 'self' is felt in his description of the indigenous people and their customs.

## **William Griffith and the Role of Botany**

William Griffith's *Journals of Travels in Assam, Burma, Bhootan, Afghanistan and the Neighbouring Countires* records his experience during his visit to Assam which was a part of the research initiated by the Tea committee in 1836. He was one of the three experts sent to inspect the indigenous nature of the tea plant in Assam. This makes Griffith one of the early travellers to British Assam. It was a pre-tea industry time with the absence of the indentured migrant workers. Griffith visited many places in Assam, mainly the eastern part and had the occasion to interact with different communities of the country. The book is a collection of letters and notes that Griffith wrote from different places where he stayed during his journeys for collecting seeds and tea plants; it was compiled posthumously by his friend and colleague, John McClelland. Apart from giving reports on his botanical explorations, Griffith tries to give some idea of the life of the people in that part of the country. His personal journal too is included where Griffith describes his journey through the Mishmi Hills and other places in Assam that he visited.

Griffith's narrative is filled with remarkably mixed expressions. Throughout his journey, he expresses his impressions of places and people. While entering the country Griffith observes the river Brahmaputra:

We left the cantonment about 11 AM, and proceeded down the Burrampooter, which is a very uninteresting river, and appears more like a net-work of water and sand banks. (*Journals 2*)

He found both the sight and stay in Cherrapunjee delightful. The stay in Cherrapunji was fruitful in terms of botanical explorations as he writes: "Our stay here has proved a source of great delight, and accumulation of botanical and geographical treasures" (4).

However, he was not at all impressed by the Khasi people and his description of the women is noteworthy. About the 'natives' he says:

Regarding the natives, I have little to say. They are a stout-built, squat, big legged hill tribe: the women in regard to shape being exactly like their mates; and as these are decidedly ugly – somewhat tartarish-looking people, very dirty, and chew pawn to profusion – they can scarcely be said to form a worthy portion of the gentler sex. (6)

It is important to note that Griffith found the place useful but the people unappreciable. In fact, he describes almost every tribe as dirty which is acceptable as the people were unaware of hygiene very much at that time. Contrastingly, Griffith finds the women of Guwahati good looking and appreciates some of the tribes and their chief men as respectable.

He seems to like the scenic beauty of the place as well. On his arrival at Guwahati he says,

All I can say in its favour is, that it is very cold in the mornings, always at this season cool; that it is very pretty, being situated on the Burrampooter, and surrounded with hills, that the women are good looking, and the whole body of officers among the best. (11)

Griffith sounds very appreciative of some people in his narratives. Although he criticizes some of the tribes as dirty and ugly, he makes positive remarks on the respectability of some chiefs. Griffith was pleased by the commander at Rangagara and he writes about the man: “During our association with him or with his country, he was remarkably attentive and civil, and as he is an independent man he pleased me much” (18). He then describes the chief of a Mishmi village, Jingsha in the same manner: “The Gam, whose name is Jingsha, is a respectable looking man, fair in his dealings, and willing to oblige” (24). Contrastingly, in his reports to the government, Griffith writes about another chief, “He is a discontented man, and his behaviour to our party was very unsatisfactory” (116). His manner of appreciation or depreciation was contingent on the kind of treatment Griffith along with his team received from those natives.

In the same report, Griffith divides the villages as ‘respectable,’ ‘wretched’ and ‘mean and despicable.’ He appreciates those who were obliging, attentive, and whose behaviour was satisfactory to them. On the contrary, when he found difficulty while dealing with people or if he found somebody who was not ‘civil’ according to his standard, Griffith is critical of them. As Bhabha observes,

The construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference—racial and sexual. Such an articulation becomes crucial if it is held that the body is

always simultaneously inscribed in both the economy of pleasure and desire and the economy of discourse, domination and power. (*Location* 67)

It is seen that Griffith—as some of the others across the chapters—engages in racial and sexual profiling of the different tribes across Assam, not so much for domination as to dismiss them as of little consequence. There is no suggestion of the exotic in his description of these people. Bhabha explains that

the epithets racial or sexual came to be seen as modes of differentiation, realised as multiple, crosscutting determinations...always demanding a specific and strategic calculation of their effects. Such is, I believe, the moment of colonial discourse... crucial to the binding of a range of differences and discriminations that inform the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural hierarchisation. (67)

The indigenous tribes are clearly the ‘other,’ either ‘wretched’ or ‘mean’ or ‘despicable’ or ‘dirty’ and ugly in Griffith’s gaze. The narrative thus reveals merely its author’s subjectivity while describing the ‘other.’ His account reflects his sense of racial superiority and colonialist zeal.

He mentions a chief who bluntly asked Griffith for presents in the form of gold, silver and other precious things. About the chief and his people what Griffith says is remarkable: “They promised to take me all over the country, and to be my slaves, if I would point out to them where salt is to be found” (*Journals* 28). With this Griffith actually highlights the pragmatic side of those indigenous people along with their needs and weaknesses. Both the government and the colonial people coming to this part of the country would be benefitted from Griffith’s account of the indigenous people, their manners, riches, their interests as well as weaknesses, and most importantly, their limitations.

Griffith’s colonialist position is reflected in his reports to the government. Although he was a member of the scientific deputation sent for the examination of the tea plant, the reports were not limited to tea. In his reports, Griffith writes about the abundance of trees, minerals and other valuable products. His report includes notes on the availability of coal and petroleum in different places of the country. He also informs that the ‘natives’ were unaware of the proper usage and value of those materials. He reports, “No use is made of

coal by the natives, nor did they seem to be aware of its nature” (117). This could be an indication to the government of the natural resources waiting to be tapped and utilized.

Griffith’s journal entries point to his scientific training as he tries to record, however briefly, pertinent facts about the various flora and fauna of the region. While he was directed specifically to make a study of the tea plant in Assam, he makes sure that he notes down whatever particulars he manages to observe. As he walks through some of the jungles he notices the rubber plant thriving in the region and makes “a report on the Caoutchouc trees," meaning rubber (226). He observes:

These trees appear to be limited to the belt of jungle or toorai which commences towards the foot of the Aka and Duphla hills, and which in the part in which I examined them is about 8 miles wide. They are said to be found likewise among the neighbouring villages....They appear to be more frequent towards the immediate base of the hills, and to prefer the drier parts of those humid and dense forests called toorai. They are frequently of vast size, and by this as well as their dense head, may be at once recognised even at a distance of a few miles....In seven miles of jungle we observed eighty trees, by far the greater portion of which were of large size. (227)

One thing noticeable about these entries is the attention to scientific detail in them. Griffith makes sure that they are not treated as the random entries of a journeyman traveller, but recorded with an eye to the conditions, topography, feasibility and so on.

Griffith joins the counting of rubber trees in the region and reports:

I calculate the number to be about 20,000. There is no reason for supposing that they are not equally abundant throughout Noadwar, nor in fact on any line where toorai prevails between Goalpara and Bishnath; beyond this, however, the increase in latitude may occasion their decrease both in number and size. On the southern side of the valley there is every reason to believe it to be equally common. (227-28)

Since rubber grows in equatorial conditions, Griffith is happy to note that it thrives in tropical and sub-tropical regions as well.

He notes that the quality of the produce is good enough to meet standards elsewhere:

If strength, elasticity, clearness, and perfect freedom from viscosity, be tests of excellence, then this product may be considered as equal to any other. It has been pronounced by persons in Calcutta to be excellent. (229)

As part of any report, the quality and the feasibility have to be uppermost along with availability. He uses his personal knowledge to check the rubber at the source but also uses the clarification of others to support his claim.

Although Griffith is excited by the quality of the rubber found in that region and the trade potential, the botanist in him makes sure that the trees are not damaged through over extraction of rubber juice:

The size of the trees...precludes all idea of any great liability to be destroyed by the extraction of juice, the amount of which must be so minute, compared to that of the whole tree. Still it may be considered desirable for the security of the tree to limit the bleedings to the cold months, and this is rendered more necessary by the inferiority of the juice during the season of active vegetation. And if it be possible to limit the number of bleedings of each tree to four or five during the above period, I consider that the present 3,000 stock cannot fail to be kept up. (229)

For all the colonial desire to tap the natural resources of the newly discovered country, Griffith is pragmatic enough to realise the destructive potential of commercial farmers and traders who would like to extract the maximum.

However, he looks ahead to planned rubber plantations coming up in the region under British nurture and surveillance.

But to venture on still larger supplies, to meet the demand for this most useful article, a demand to which limits can scarcely be assigned, the formation of plantations should be encouraged, the sites chosen to be near the villages bordering on the line of the natural distribution of the tree. (229)

Griffith is all for the plantation of rubber on a larger scale for commercial production. Since the report would be presented to the Government agencies, he makes sure that all

the modalities are explored for possible implementation of his suggestions. He mentions proximity to the villages so that sufficient man power could be available to work on the plantations.

He just wants to make sure that the trees do not suffer.

Propagation by cuttings or layers cannot fail to be of easy and rapid application; and if we consider that the tree is the most valuable receptacle of the lac insect, there is every reason to suppose that the natives will readily enter into such views. (229)

Griffith wants to make sure that the indigenous people are interested in this project. Once they learn of its utility there is no reason for the colonial administration to persuade anybody.

With that report underway, Griffith turns to looking for tea, the main reason for his trip. He writes that they

after traversing for a short time some rather higher ground, came on the tea. This patch is never under water; there is no peculiarity of vegetation connected with it. It runs about N. and S. for perhaps 150 yards by 40 to 50 in breadth. The Gam had cleared the jungle of all, except the larger trees and the low *herbaceous underwood*, so that a *\_coup d'oeil\_* was at once obtained. (88)

However, he is not happy to note some of the pruning activity of the Gams with the tea trees. He sees that some of the trees are felled and some of the underwood removed.

My conviction is, that the tea will not flourish in open sunshine; at any rate, subjection to this should be gradual. Further, that cutting the main stem is detrimental, not only inducing long shoots, but most probably weakening the flavour of the leaves. It appears to me to be highly desirable, that an intelligent superintendent should reside on the spot, and that he should at least be a good practical gardener, with some knowledge of the science also. (88-89)

Griffith faithfully takes stock of the conditions under which the tea plant is likely to thrive most and having recorded that, he looks around like any other traveller to enjoy

the sights around him. He mentions their trip from Gauhati to Sadiya through Tezpur by boat:

I proceeded in advance...for Tezpoor, which place I reached on the evening of the 6th.... Tezpoor possesses many advantages over Gowahatty, from which place it is about 120 miles distant, that is, following the river. It is situated on the banks of what was once a portion of the Burrampooter, but which is now nothing but a nullah, nearly dry at the present season. It is a completely new place, Captain Matthie having arrived here about a year since, at which time it was a complete jungle. Some small hills run along the side of the nullah, on one of which Captain Matthie's house is situated....The great advantage it has over Gowahatty consists in its freedom from fogs, which evidently hug the Meekur hills on the opposite side of the Burrampooter...from Tezpoor. (47-48)

Apart from the river trip through different settlements of Assam, Griffith takes in the weather conditions, the heat, the rain, even the fog. From Tezpur he looks northward to the Himalayas and observes: "The view to the S. and S.S.W. is barren enough, and is completely flat; the country presenting nothing whatever but high grass, with an occasional peep of the river. That to the north is, owing to the Himalayas, very striking and picturesque" (48).

Griffith next turns to the other crops that grow in the valley:

Cultivation is carried on to a great extent about Tezpoor, and the district is populous, although few villages are to be seen, as they are all concealed among trees. Paddy is the principal grain cultivated, and this is carried on in low places, which appear on a casual examination to have been originally beds of rivers. Captain Matthie however tells me, that many of these have abrupt terminations and commencements, such may have been old jheels. Sursoo, opium, and sugar-cane are likewise cultivated, especially the former. (49)

Interestingly, Griffith the scientist is never far from Griffith the traveller. Even as he observes the crops growing on the dry river bed and in the shallows of the flatlands, his colleague Captain Matthie informs him about the formations of these jheels (lakes) and how the rivers keep changing course and abandon or reclaim courses. This too, may be



seen as part of colonialist design as “travel (and subsequent production of scientific texts, travel narratives, or works combining elements of both genres) was one of the principal ways in which India was captured not just for empire, but also for science” as Arnold affirms (*Tropics* 30). Griffith's efforts were obviously a step in this direction.

In keeping with other colonials, Griffith appears to share a taste for hunting. If he cannot observe botanical specimens or some of the common trees and crops, not to say animals, he thinks of some other activity and hunting comes to his mind:

The whole land indeed, with the exception of the rice-places and the evidently old beds of the Burrampooter, are much more elevated than the land round Gowahatty. Both Tezpoor and Durrung are consequently less damp, and more healthy than the above-mentioned place. In fact, as a residence I would infinitely prefer Tezpoor to Gowahatty. With regard to the shikar, (shooting) both large and small game abound. Tigers are frequent as well as bears. Buffaloes are to be seen on the *churs* (islands) in large herds. Pea-fowl and jungle-fowl abound, as well as water-fowl; floricans and partridges, both black and red, are by no means unfrequent. (*Journals* 49)

Griffith makes sure that his report includes other crops in the region and at the same time he looks at the weather conditions which would be conducive to the humans as well as for the growth of tea. He appears to take in a lot of things at a glance as he notes the various birds and then the small and big game and their habitats. Griffith is obviously doing his job, but in the process he is going around naming things and making them a part of the repository of colonial knowledge.

The other pursuits taken care of, he turns his focus back on the tea:

Nothing particular presents itself in the jungle until you approach the tea, on which you come very suddenly. This plant is limited to a small extent, perhaps to 300 yards square, the principal direction being N. and S. It grows in a part of the jungle where the soil is light and dryish, and throughout which, *ravinules* are frequent, due, Mac. tells me, to the effect of rain dropping from the heavy over-shadowing foliage on a light soil. (49-50)

Elsewhere in Tingrai, he notices tea growing in abundance:

The tea here may be characterised as dwarf, no stems that I saw exceeding fifteen feet in height; it had just passed flowering. It occurs in great abundance, and to much greater extent than in any of the places at which we had previously examined it. But here it is neither limited by peculiarity of soil or such slight elevation as the place affords; it grows indiscriminately on the higher ground where the soil is of a brownish yellow, and on which it attains a larger size than elsewhere, or on clumps occurring in low raviny ground and associated with fine bamboos. (54)

Griffith sees different varieties of tea--some as tall trees and some as dwarf bushes. While he does not leave out human agency in ground clearing and pruning, he realises that there must be different species which with nurture and special conditions would produce a certain desired result. He records that tea grows on slight inclines to prevent water from collecting at the bottom, although it requires a lot of rain.

Griffith appears to have adopted different positions in his writing. In his reports to the government, he expresses his colonialist instincts; in the letters he emerges as a shrewd observing 'self'; and contrary to that, in his narratives he presents himself as an honest visitor but without having any critical concern. His *Journal* thus represents layers of his own 'self,' constructed both politically and personally. This reveals the narrator's political motives as an agent to the administration who sees himself in the colonialist's position while viewing the travelled 'other.'

### **Pollock and Thom: In and Out of the Wild**

*Wild Sports of Burma and Assam* is a book written in collaboration by Colonel F. T. Pollock and W. S. Thom where both the authors have described their personal experiences of travel and residence in Assam and Burma (present day Myanmar). Pollock was an engineer by profession who was employed in the government project of road making and surveying in some of the districts of British Assam. He spent thirteen years in Burma and over seven years in Assam; his colleague, W. S. Thom too had eleven years of experience of living in the two provinces. Both the men took sport as a passion and hence did a lot of hunting in the jungles of Assam and Burma which they

have described in *Wild Sports of Burma and Assam*. Thom narrates his experiences in Upper Burma whereas Pollock writes about his adventures in both Burma and Assam.

Pollock and Thom's book is full of vivid descriptions of hunting experiences which also included some exciting as well as fearful moments of the authors' encounters with dangerous animals. Besides their sport experiences, both the authors have tried to draw pictures of the places and the people they met during their expeditions in the region. They have declared the authenticity of the information as the records were taken from their personal diaries. Based on his experiences in these two provinces, Pollock had written another book in two volumes titled *Sport in British Burmah, Assam, and the Cassyah and Jyntiah Hills* in 1879. Pollock mentions this book in the Preface of *Wild Sports of Burma and Assam* and expresses his dissatisfaction about the errors in the book. He, therefore, narrates the same experiences in the collaborative text although with a slight difference in tone.

Pollock's narrative on Assam is indeed very interesting as well as significant as the author delivers information that exposes the British government's unfair treatment of the province. Although Assam was the richest in natural resources there was hardly any administrator who showed interest in the province and its development. There are many colonial writers who express wonder at the rapid development done by the colonial government in Assam and they also promote the 'grace' of colonialism in the country; unlike them, Pollock says that Assam was actually the most neglected province and not much was done for its development. He writes, "Of all our possessions in the East, Assam is probably the richest in natural resources, and up to a very late period, also the most neglected and backward" (*Wild Sports* 427). It is in fact a matter of wonder to Pollock that such a rich region has been neglected by the government.

Pollock informs the reader in the Preface to the book about his life in Burma and then in Assam and how he got to explore the places:

I was not twenty-one years old when I went to Burma: I possessed the constitution of a buffalo, I had private means of my own, and drew exceptionally good pay from Government, and I was, to all intents and purposes, my own master... I was employed in road-making and surveying from Meaday down to Bassein and Rangoon, and even to Cape Negrals, thus my opportunities of exploring the country and indulging in its wild sports were unrivalled. (ix)

The picture he presents of himself is that of a tough person willing to work hard and also to have sufficient time for hunting, which as usual was a colonial sport. Pollock mentions the freedom he enjoyed in his work, something shared by the tea planters in their isolated gardens too.

Pollock explains how he got to know Assam well enough to write about it:

In Assam I had similar work to do I had the districts of Nowgong, Tezpore, Durrung, Goalpara, the Cossyah and Jynteah Hills under me, and I was expected to be out in the district at all seasons; and for nearly eight years there were very few square miles that I had not traversed...I was inured to the climate, which is not nearly as deadly as represented; I was constitutionally strong, and I was also a believer in outdoor life...(ix)

Pollock had to work in a very large area across central Assam as he went about surveying and laying roads. That he liked the outdoors helped him in his job but he tried to adjust to the conditions. His decision not to consume hard liquor apart from beer shows that he took care to abstain from things that do not suit life in the tropics.

He also believes that the whole region would have been ignored but for the discovery of the tea plant:

Although Assam has fields of coal, petroleum, slate and other minerals in abundance, nothing was done to work them, and had it not been for the lucky discovery of the tea-plant I believe the Province would have been neglected to this day. (425-26)

Pollock thinks that the tea industry and the probable marketing profit drew some attention of the government towards this province but records say that even after the discovery of high quality tea, indigenous to the region, the British government was not seen active in setting up the industry and instead was delaying the whole process. This implies the possibility of a preconceived idea or an imagined picture of the province which was stopping it from taking an active interest. Pollock seems elated in his description of the country and is very positive about the future prospects for his fellow people in the region. He even dismisses the notion about Assam's unhealthy environment and assures his readers that it is definitely a livable place for the Europeans.

Pollock does not appear to be happy with the Assamese people: “The Assamese are difficult to deal with; the people are debased, given to debauchery and opium, and it is impossible to depend on them” (430). He criticizes the Bengali Babus for not learning anything from their education and for imitating the vices of the Europeans. Pollock thinks that education was helping the people only to acquire evil things rather than enlightening their minds.

He pictures the Assamese people as untrustworthy and without any scruple who could swear to false things than to the truth. He says: “The Assamese are most litigious, and will swear to a lie than to the truth” (430). However, among the people of Assam, Pollock found the Kacharis preferable but he believed that they too were in the process of degradation as a result of the influence of the Hindu religion.

Pollock describes experiences of his visits in Assam. He went to Barpeta as he was employed to repair some government buildings and he describes many incidents where he faced difficulty while sporting as well as in dealing with the native people. He complains about the administrative system and the local administrators called Mauzadars who, according to him, were not doing their duties. Pollock found that the people did not want to work unless their Mauzadars ordered them to. Moreover, the mauzadars were not very sincere in their work:

The Assamese are an intractable race and will do nothing without being forced by the Mouzadar, who is seldom forth coming. They don't live in their mouzahs, but go to some large town, where there are plenty of dancing girls, and they can drink and debauch themselves to their heart's content. (437)

In fact, according to Pollock, the whole Assamese race was given to sloppiness and the people were very much into morally improper activities.

He calls Assam a ‘jungly country’ (478) where the people too were wild and savage-like. Pollock describes a hunting experience with the natives to show the savage nature of the people. The natives went with spears and machetes as those were the only weapons they had but to Pollock, it was very savage-like and their way of hunting too was gruesome to him. An important point to note is that Pollock describes the same personal experiences in two books but the tone of the narratives and the attitude of the narrator differ a bit. In

both books, Pollock is condescending towards the 'other' but his attitude is rather severe in *Wild Sports of Burma and Assam*.

Pollock's enthusiasm for hunting which he accommodates in his weekly routine exposes a different dimension to his personality. From his own reports he revels in pitting his wits against that of powerful wild animals. He writes:

At last, in front of me, behind a bush, stood a rhinoceros, intently listening to the noise made by the elephant splashing along. Neither the mahout nor elephant saw the game ahead. I tapped the mahout on the head, and he stopped his beast at once. I fired into the mass before me, and as the smoke cleared away, a very large rhinoceros rushed into the open and got another bullet in its shoulder. He pulled up. I dropped the discharged weapon and took up another, and gave him two pills in the chest; he swerved and ran off, squealing awfully. On hearing this noise my steed right-about faced, and raced for her life, and could not be stopped for some time. So I went back to the bheel and took up the trail, and soon came upon the rhinoceros stone dead. (434)

But his enthusiasm for this sport in a land where he operates without restraint, shows how blood thirsty he is. Without reason, he guns down wild animals if he manages to come near them. What is interesting is that most of these occasions present themselves when Pollock goes hunting or comes across animals within shooting range. What Pollock himself celebrates as a British sport calling for endurance, can be seen as a terrible and wholly unnecessary loss of animal life, simply because he feels good exercising his rights over less fortunate others. Pollock's attitude to hunting is not at issue here; what is significant, however, is his attitude to the colonial site where like the superior Westerner, he thinks he can throw his weight around, bullying people and animals.

It may be noted that it is not only his attitude to the regular hunting of animals but the way he presents his hunting exploits draws attention to the passion in Pollock for hunting:

The Lower Assam Company had a bungalow in the station (Gowhatty) ; there was a good deal of jungle about its vicinity, and twice Fisher, their able manager, had shots at tigers from the back verandah, but failed to bag; and several leopards were caught there in traps. Near Moirapore, a tea-garden of the Lower Assam

Company, there was very good snipe-shooting, and the officers of the Company shot a good number of tigers there by sitting up over kills. Five miles from Govvhatty on the Beltolah road was the best snipe ground, and we used to get lots of junglefowl, pea-fowl, and a few florikan. At Myung wild game abounded; I have shot there at times tigers, rhinoceros, buffaloes, deer, a few hares, lots of florikan, and now and then had capital sport both with the black and kyah partridges. (438-39)

There appears to be no thought of curtailing his hunting activities. It looks like some kind of hunting spree as if he had taken a vow to decimate the animal population of Assam. The whole reckless conduct, celebrated as a kind of chest-thumping heroism, reflects the mindset of the colonialist without any sense of right or wrong.

In his first book on Assam, Pollock describes other vices in the Europeans too which is again another interesting fact. Pollock reveals how European frauds were trying to deceive their fellow countrymen. He blames the dishonest Europeans for ruining the tea industry of Assam and tells how European frauds succeeded in selling non existing gardens with fictitious reports and plans to rich people in England.

Pollock also points out the negligence of the colonial government and its indifferent attitude towards Assam's development. According to him, the officials hardly knew anything about the country and its people and that there was misgovernance as Assam was not a separate region but an annexed part of Bengal till 1874. He finds faults in the system of administration in Assam where the officials were corrupt and dishonest. However, Pollock thinks that the great fault is with the natives and not with the Europeans. In his other book, *Sport in British Burma* he says,

The great drawback to Assam is the people who are a mongrel set, cowardly and treacherous, great opium eaters, and very often drunkards... Both sexes are very lascivious, and their priests' abodes are nests of prostitutes, who, whilst dispensing their favours indiscriminately, are yet supposed to be perpetual virgins. (*Sport in British Burma* 70)

Pollock finds that the natives had such negative feelings for Europeans that they hated the latter. He too reciprocates by showing similar attitude towards them which is evident in both his books.

Pollock expresses his displeasure with the Assamese people and there are times when he shows his disapproval of the people in its extreme level. He found it not at all comfortable to go with them and whenever he found difficulty, Pollock did not hesitate to abuse the Assamese people. In fact, Pollock shows not only a colonialist attitude, he never lets go of any chance where he can use derogatory terms for the 'natives.' In fact, Pollock is completely against the people and their ways; he even opines that the Assamese people were fit to be slaves only: "The Assamese are only fit to be slaves, and will do nothing unless driven" (*Wild Sports* 465). He even criticizes the native language and calls the language of Barpeta a "bastard sort of Bengali" (439). He categorizes the colonial subjects and places the Assamese just a notch above the Africans.

Pollock makes it very clear that he is not only for the colonization but for the enslavement of the 'natives' as well. He therefore wishes the country to be occupied by other countries just to teach a lesson to its inhabitants. He says,

How do I wish that either the Russians, Yankees, or French could occupy Bengal and Assam in particular for a few years, just to teach the people a lesson. It is absurd to put these savages on an equality with ourselves. If we are equal we have no business in the country. If we hold it as conquerors, we should treat them as the conquered, and force them to treat us as their masters. (*Sport in British Burma* 92-93)

This at once exposes the colonialist motive and nullifies the 'white man's burden.' Pollock thus negates the philanthropic policy of colonialism as he openly denounces the civilizing mission and wishes for establishing a master-slave relationship in the country. However, it cannot be seen only in terms of power equations. Pollock wants somebody to take these 'savages' in hand so that if they do not know what is right for them, somebody else would show them.

However, Pollock appreciates the beauty of Shillong and Cherrapunjee as he could relate its climate and flora to those of his own country. He was indeed very much enthralled to find 'english' flowers blooming in that place. He writes: "the place was very healthy, and all english flowers throve exceedingly" (*Wild Sports* 493). The abundant produces along with the cheap labour and objects available in those places too added to his delight. This sense of being at home was missing in Assam which might have created a negative impression in the travellers' minds and that gets resulted in the portrayal of the people in



the authors' accounts. When he faced difficulty in procuring workers in Assam, Pollock expresses his dissatisfaction. He therefore, advises his fellow countrymen to have their own arrangements while going for hunting in Assam:

I would advise no one to go on a shooting trip in Assam who cannot muster enough elephants to be altogether independent of manual labour. It is heart-rending work to have anything to say to the wretched inhabitants. (440)

Pollock calls them people with ingratitude. This trouble of finding workers was not there in Cherrapunjee and that made the author happy. Nonetheless, there was no mention of the inhabitants of that beautiful land which could be read as 'textual apartheid' in Pollock's narrative.

### **A. C. Newcombe: India Uncovered**

Alfred Cornelius Newcombe's *Village, Town, And Jungle Life in India* is based on the author's experience in different places of India. Newcombe was one of the fifty people appointed from Cooper Hill College to the Public Works Department in India and he was among the first eleven engineers that came to the country in October 1874. Newcombe had the experience of staying in several places of British India; he was impressed by some places whereas some other places marked negative impressions on him.

Bombay was Newcombe's first work place in India. He gives a pleasant description of the city and its people. Newcombe compares the city life of Bombay with that in Europe and finds the former more delightful. About his first impression Newcombe says:

all are in striking contrast to anything in Europe. The traveller is made so comfortable, and is so free to wander and inquire, the people are so friendly and polite, the scenes and incidents are so varied and amusing, that his impressions are vivid, and he is filled with wonder and gratification. (*Village* 5)

He further says: "And over all there is a peculiar quiet business-like style, with no shouting or rough pushing as would be the case in England" (7). These are indeed very significant observations. This is a common tendency in the Europeans to compare the Indian life with that of his own country and the common observation is that they always find the Indian unimpressive as opposed to the European. But in case of Newcombe, the things reverse as he finds himself in a free state where people are friendly and polite.

Before coming to Assam, Newcombe visited many places of India which he describes in his book: the impressive towns in sharp contrast to the insanitary villages, famine, the trying climate, temples etc. He observes that the climate is not unhealthy:

Though trying, the hot dry weather is usually healthy, if the right times for bathing, sleep, and meals are attended to, the diet frugal, and over-exertion in the sun avoided. (76)

Newcombe appreciates the Indian people's honesty and goodness but most of the time, he is writing about those government employees working in low positions. He is very much impressed by the servants from North India and wherever he goes he tries to judge whether the native people will make good servants or not.

He discusses cultural differences between the Indian and the European while focusing on tyrannical practices in the 'natives' like burning of the sati and veiling of women. He also brings out the evil in some of the 'native' cultures: Hindu marriage, widowhood, child-marriage and the women's sufferings and the societies obligations on their lives. Newcombe hopes that the British government will put an end to all those. In fact, Newcombe believes that it should be the responsibility of every European man in India as he says, "The Englishmen in India usually is, and ought always to be, a reformer." (22) This is indeed a reference to the philanthropic nature associated with the colonial people in India. He put faith on the government that it would reduce the troubles of the 'native' people. Newcombe talks about famine in the dry places in India and tries to defend the colonial government who had been alleged to be unfair towards the famine affected people. From the very beginning, Newcombe seems to be maintaining a colonialist attitude while patronizing the British subject.

Newcombe mentions the climate and draws a link between it and the people's lethargy:

The climate of Assam is more equable; and, while being in some months pleasantly cool, is never intensely hot, the temperature seldom rising above ninety degrees. As in other warm damp climates of the East, the land is very fertile, and the Assamese have, therefore, few wants which are not provided for by Nature without the necessity for hard work. (56-7)

Because of the fertile conditions, the people of Assam have no reason to exert themselves much. Their needs are little and most of them are answered without hardship.

Newcombe continues:

They live in huts or houses easily built in a few days, or even in a few hours, of bamboos, reeds, and grass ; their clothing costs little, and food of some kind is always at hand. What exertion they put forth to get food is merely that required to plant and reap the rice and other simple crops. In the intervals between the sowing and the reaping seasons they remain for months almost idle. (57)

He tries to find out what makes the Assamese inactive in conditions which are helpful to say the least.

He learns that the people of Assam were different from the rest of the people across India:

I was to be among an effeminate apathetic people, so averse to work that labourers for the public works and tea industry have to be imported from Bengal and the North-West Provinces and other parts of India. (256)

Newcombe is bemused by the Assamese people's reluctance to work. This was creating enough problems in the tea gardens or any other enterprise calling for man power and physical labour. Again bringing labourers from outside Assam entailed resettlement of labourers as well as the cost incurred in their transportation. Having observed the scanty population—'only 109 to the square mile'—and the easy conditions in Assam, Newcombe has a suggestion to make which he believes will answer several needs. He writes, "Famine never visits Assam; and on these unoccupied tracts might well be settled some of the poor cultivators of Bengal who find it hard to live in the congested districts" (257). The resettlement of cultivators from Bengal in Assam would ensure a greater work force in Assam, readily available workers for the tea gardens, and more people to utilize the opportunities in the region. Newcombe's description hints at the immense possibilities awaiting the colonial people in this fertile land. He also draws attention to the riches in the hills; the untouched timber and rubber and the coal fields.

Although he calls the Assam climate favourable than that of many other places of India, Newcombe has opposite views on jungle life. While introducing the various tribes of Assam he says:

they live mostly in unhealthy jungle, where English people would get ill with fever and be troubled by the ticks and other insects; and they say that the plains and the open hills do not agree with them. (290)

According to Newcombe, after exposure to Western civilization, the 'wild' tribes have improved a lot. He describes some of the tribes as inoffensive and timid, and believes that they could easily be converted into Christianity. He also discusses some of the government's policies while dealing with some plundering tribes, the government's paying them to keep away from creating trouble. He sometimes found the hill tribes absurd, savage and horrible and calls the Nagas 'worst of all' tribes. He defines them as "a treacherous, vindictive, and quarrelsome tribe that had to be roughly handled" (294). Supporting the policy of force and violence, Newcombe says that it was needed to tame some of the wild tribes as the Nagas.

Newcombe defines the native people's custom very simple and says that one cannot judge them by looking at their faces. He writes:

The Assamese coolies show little energy or interest in their work. They and the men employed for household duties, and the villagers have heavy unattractive faces, giving the impression at first that they are surly. They are, however, not that. (265)

He tells how the 'natives' respect the Europeans; their gestures of dismounting horses or bicycles on meeting a European on the street, or closing an umbrella as a sign of courtesy. However, he found the people 'slow and dull' (265) as servants which is very important so far as Newcombe's expectation from the 'other' is concerned. Despite their respect for the white sahibs, as Newcombe observes, the 'natives' lacked goodwill not only to Europeans but also to their own people. They were extremely superstitious and were addicted to opium. He describes them as apathetic and cruel in their customs. But then, he highlights that the British government had abolished many evil practices in the natives.

Discussing the wilderness and the wildlife all around, Newcombe draws a picture of what they do during tours:

Tents are not suitable for Assam, and in wild parts where no bungalow is available we sleep in covered bullock - carts or in boats, or build huts for the night. On such occasions, about five or six o'clock in the evening, I would give

the word to stop and build the huts. The coolies would then all disappear into the jungle, while my servants spread rugs in a dry part and gave me my dinner on the ground. Soon the coolies reappeared with bamboos and bundles of grass. The bamboos were rapidly chopped into lengths, and the outside skin was peeled off into thin strips which were used as string. The thick bamboos were driven into the ground at the four corners of the hut to be made, and light frames for the sides and roof were soon fastened together, bound into position, and stuffed in between with grass or reeds. Within an hour or so there was a small village of huts for the men, the horses, the bulls, and myself. (279-80)

Apart from Newcombe having to live rough (but safe), the above account points to the dexterity of the workers who can erect a number of huts within a few hours. It also draws attention to the importance of bamboo in the lives of the indigenous people of Assam.

Next, he describes the modes of transport and the precedence river travel takes over land.

A pleasanter way of travelling is by the large river steamers. On them it is interesting to get a chat with the officers who trade between Assam and Calcutta; and the change from the close jungles to the open air of the mid stream is bracing. On the smaller streams inland one has to be satisfied with the country boats, with only a bamboo mat as roof; and in this way I had some long tedious journeys, lying down all day while going from town to town in Sylhet. Sometimes a dug-out is useful: and once I crossed the Brahmapootra from Koliabar to Tezpur in one. (280-81)

The rivers are convenient to travel on although one runs into rapids here and there. Rivers appear to be the lifeline of Assam. While the larger river steamers make travel pleasant and connect the region with Calcutta (Kolkata), Newcombe recalls his exchanges with people who did trade between Assam and Calcutta. The river steamers obviously connect Assam with the world outside. But he is pragmatic enough to recognize the usefulness of the little manually propelled boats in crossing rivers, despite the discomfort or the danger.

Like other writers, Newcombe also accepts the significance of the tea gardens in Assam:

The tea-gardens are scattered all over Assam where the soil is good and the drainage can be satisfactorily done.... The processes of plucking, withering,

rolling, drying, sorting, and packing, and the improved machinery, all require careful attention....The planters are famous for their hospitality; and I found them always friendly and anxious to make me comfortable....It is a fact that they rarely drink tea at their meals, beer and whisky-pegs being preferred. Perhaps this may be excused, seeing that they do so much tea-tasting in the course of the manufacture. More than a hundred million pounds are manufactured each year in Assam. (282)

While the description of the way the planters live is not very different from others, the planters' preference for other kinds of brew is interesting. However it is the amount of tea produced in a year in Assam that is the significant point. It points to the dominance of tea in Assam's economy and the prospects for future investment in the same.

Newcombe describes his abortive attempts to kill a tiger. Unlike Pollock who enjoyed hunting and killing animals on a regular basis, Newcombe tries to hunt down a tiger which had killed a bull near his work site. Despite lying in wait for the tiger he finds that the tiger had outsmarted them and dragged the carcass of the hunted animal into the bush.

Unfortunately—or was it fortunately ?—when we reached the spot the body was no longer there, the tiger no doubt having dragged it into the jungle to feed on it where he would not be disturbed. So I missed the only opportunity that ever offered of bagging a tiger. (283)

That does not mean that Newcombe did not have to live amidst danger. Humorously, he describes his intentions and the actions to combat the tiger menace.

Newcombe records the frequent earthquakes and their effect on the people:

Assam is on a line of country subject to earthquakes, and the small ones come every year. When one is approaching the rumbling is heard growing louder as it gets near, and the natives run out of the huts and shout till the disturbance has passed away. They say it is a shaitan, and that they frighten him away by their shouting, which, of course, is proved by the fact that the rumbling passes off in the direction opposite to that from which it came....In one earthquake, my bungalow being built chiefly of bamboo, I felt the movement so much that it was like being at sea, and I had some difficulty in keeping my feet. Such bungalows

are safer, as they give to the motion, and have elasticity enough to recover. It is the rigid brick or stone buildings which resist the earthquake that get shattered (289)

If tigers and other wild animals pose a threat to life and property in Assam, they cannot undermine the danger from earthquakes which are common in Assam. As reported, Newcombe mentions some very strong quakes which make him appreciate the way and the materials out of which their bungalows were built.

He discusses the religious beliefs of the indigenous people. The different sects within the Hindu religion and their different ways, practice of casteism, other rituals, superstitions, animal sacrifices etc. have been matters of concern to Newcombe. Once again, he highlights the role of the British government in abolishing some of the evil practices of Hinduism such as purdah system, infanticide, sati and infant marriage. He also points out how some of the native rulers actually revealed their own cruelties through their activities done in the name of religion. One such horrible practice was human sacrifice which has been abolished with the British government's intervention. The hill tribes were mostly demon worshippers and the government's joint scheme with the missionaries was successful in the hills.

Newcombe writes about the energetic missionaries who failed to influence the high caste people but succeeded in converting many of the 'native' tribes. He writes: "They fail to influence the higher castes, in any appreciable degree, and succeeded most among the low castes, the outcastes, and the aboriginal tribes" (373). This reveals an important point that the 'natives' who got converted to Christianity did so because of the discrimination they had been through in their own religion and not because they started having faith in the new God of the white men.

Newcombe's sole intention seems to be the promotion of the colonial government in Assam and India at large. According to him, the history of this old country had been one of treachery and cruelty. He states:

The history of India has been one of treachery and cruelty among the races, conquest and massacre by invaders, intrigue and oppression on the part of the rulers, and perpetuation of superstition by the priests. (400)

The people are made ignorant by their age old superstitions and were oppressed by native rulers. Newcombe praises the British government repeatedly and is vocal about the positive works done by different government departments and the progress of the country. Newcombe posits:

That the British system has been of much efficiency there is plenty of evidence. Instead of frequent devastating wars there is now internal peace, and the frontier is secure. (402)

The comparison between the cruel rulers from the past and the benevolent protectors in the present has been an important feature of Newcombe's narrative. The interesting fact is that in the years to come the same protecting government turned out to be looters and exploiters only.

Newcombe's narrative, thus, is an obvious attempt to celebrate colonialism. The focus is on the role of the British government as reformer. In his representation, the 'natives' are simple and primitive creatures confined in age old customs, who also lack any goodness or sympathy towards others. But at the same time, they are shown to be dutiful towards their own people and respectful towards their British administrators. Newcombe, as such, creates confusion by offering self-contradictory remarks regarding the nature of the 'other.' However, his sole concern seems to highlight the great changes brought about by the colonial government into the lives of the indigenous people.

### **Walter Del Mar: The Romance of the East**

Walter Del Mar, in *The Romantic East* describes his experiences of visit to Burma, Assam and Kashmir. As the title suggests, the author's concern in his book is to explore the romance of the places he visited, the elements that were attracting people to those places. About the attraction in Assam, Del Mar writes: "The romance of Assam is a purely commercial one, connected with the tea industry" (*Romantic* v). Accordingly, he visits a tea garden. He gets down at a place called Kamarbandha Ali station where he found his tea-planter friends. About the planter's house on the tea plantation, Del Mar informs:

Life in a bungalow on an Assam tea-garden is very much the same as it is in other remote districts in India. There are the same heavy risks to life and health taken lightly, and the same social trivialities taken seriously. (110)



Del Mar's comment draws attention to the fact that the people in the tea gardens appear to live in a world cut off from the rest of civilization. Because of the nature of work outdoors, they are exposed to the elements and have to live with numerous health risks from insect bites, water pollution, the heat apart from physical attacks from wild animals and snakebites. Living among such conditions people, especially the Europeans, tend to overlook or undermine some of these risks as they get caught up in work or tend to underestimate the dangers of living in the tropics. Again because of their isolation they tend to lose their sense of proportion and try to hold on to some of their social practices from England which should have been deemed trivialities.

Del Mar mentions these things in the lives of the Europeans who form the tea-garden community because being cut off from England or the rest of Europe, which they see as civilization, they feel that they have to maintain at least a show of some of these customs. Further, it hints at the insularity of their lives amidst a culture and people whom they can only see as the 'other.' He, however, observes: "There is the close clinging to the customs and habits of back "home," together with a quickened ingenuity in adapting the local conditions to one's wants, or in adapting oneself to the local conditions" (110-111). Sometimes as Del Mar observes, the Europeans show signs of some enterprise in adjusting to the conditions or adapting the local conditions to fit in with their requirements. Even as the Europeans in the tea gardens try to create a home away from home, they sometimes show an openness of attitude by using local resources or learning to accommodate some non-European food and other items like clothing for instance, in their repertoire.

Del Mar tells that although it is the product of tea that attracts the outsiders and investors from Europe, life on the plantation is not so easy. The delights and comforts that one can get in a town or city of India are not available in the remote tea districts of Assam. Like Colonel Pollock, Del Mar firmly believes that although the region is rich in minerals, if there was no discovery of the tea plant, the British would never have come to such a remote place like Assam. According to him, the tea-gardens were the only sources of the region's exports, its commercial prosperity and its wealth. However, he agrees that the region had its glorious past when it was under a settled government ruled by 'native' kings.

Since Del Mar believes that the reputation of Assam rests on tea, he writes at length about the tea industry. He describes its history which goes back to the discovery of the plant in Assam. Del Mar remembers C. A. Bruce's efforts, who sent tea samples from his experimental garden to the botanists in Calcutta. He writes about the formation of Assam Tea Company, establishment of the first tea garden and the contribution of important persons to the industry. At the same time, Del Mar discusses the problems faced by the tea industry which includes the labour question, the rate of exchange and the English tea tax which was not letting the planters make good profit.

He mentions the indigenous people's unwillingness to work in the tea gardens which created a lot of problems for the planters as the tea industry relied on a sizeable work force. He represents its inhabitants as a people who had few wants in life and never thought of exerting themselves. The people cultivated easily grown crops and were not interested in working in the tea gardens. Such conditions created a shortage of labour on the plantations for which the planters had to depend upon imported labour:

The labour problem...early became a vital question, as the natives of Assam were quite content to cultivate the easily grown rice and mustard which sufficed for long their limited wants; and coolie labour, imported from Chhota Nagpur and other over-populated districts in India, became a necessity which caused many difficulties. We are told that 700,000 people imported from India are engaged in the Assam tea industry, and the total number employed in and around the gardens was, according to the census of 1901, 657831 of whom 318406...were females.  
(114)

By citing figures, Del Mar tries to show that he does not have to rely on hearsay alone. Interestingly, the author insists on looking at Assam as being outside the Indian Union, despite the book being published in 1906 when Assam and Eastern Bengal had been newly formed into a joint state which continued till 1911. Prior to 1905, it had been a part of the North-East Frontier from 1874 till 1905. Whether this omission is deliberate or not, there was a tendency in some of these colonial writers on Assam to look at it as a part of the forsaken wilderness, being drawn back towards civilization with the sweat of European effort. As shown in the earlier chapter, these writers looked upon the tea gardens of Assam as miniature colonized territories.

Del Mar takes stock of Assam's resources and its defining characteristics:

The romance of Assam is a romance of commerce, the history of a savage country brought under civilised rule through the cultivation, by alien labour, of a single product. It is true that Chittagong and part of the western districts of Assam were under a settled government long before tea was grown in the Brahmaputra valley, and it is true that oil and coal are found beneath the surface of the land upon which the Assamese grows for his own needs abundant crops of rice. (111)

The presence of these mineral resources was not sufficient to attract colonial forces; had tea not emerged as a cash crop in the region through British enterprise, it would have been left on its own.

As Del Mar observes,

But in spite of its other resources, the upper Brahmaputra would probably have been left in the undisturbed possession of the native tribes if it were not for the discovery of the native tea plant and the ultimate establishment of the tea-gardens. The tea gardens are to Assam...the source of its exports, its commercial prosperity and its wealth. (111)

This shows that the writer is not unaware of Assam's status under British rule. He had obviously heard of the mineral resources in Assam through earlier surveys conducted by colonial agents, but as far as he is concerned, all else pales in comparison to the production of tea. Moreover the location of the river Brahmaputra made it convenient to transport the tea outside the state to Calcutta (Kolkata) for export to Europe. He mentions how they collected tea for such a purpose: "At Bishnath, where we lay up for the night, we took on hundreds of cases of Peckoe, Broken Orange Peckoe, and Peckoe Souchang from the tea plantations. These extend on the north bank below Rangamati, and on the south bank to a point about 25 miles below Gauhati" (119-20). Thus the river acted as the main transport route connecting Assam with the rest of the country.

Del Mar describes the climate of Assam very trying during the rainy season but very pleasant in the winter. He finds "the air bracing and surprisingly clear" (116). He notes that "It may or may not be foggy in the early morning, but after...breakfast, the sun is sure to come out and the temperature rise to between 60<sup>0</sup> and 70<sup>0</sup> in the shade, to fall

again to 40° at night” (116). He is willing to notice the good things around him without being wholly dismissive.

Like most visitors to Assam, Del Mar registers the influence of the river Brahmaputra on the people and the place:

The Brahmaputra is several miles broad after the rains, but in the cold weather one bank is frequently steep while the other consists of *chars* of pure sand left by the receding flood. The steep banks are over-grown with reeds and grasses, while the borders of the sand banks are strewn with black chips guarded by a tiny wading- bird. (117)

The vastness of the river is to be seen to be believed. Its opposite banks touch different terrains from the hills to the flat plains of the valley. Del Mar mentions all this because the sense of heights and distances can be misleading. What looks near may be at a great distance and the reachable may be quite high.

The banks seem in the clear air to be about 10 feet high, and the reeds about 8 feet, when suddenly through an opening at the base of the reeds walks a full-grown man, and you find by the comparative height that the banks are 50 to 60 feet high and the reeds from 15 to 18 feet. Examined with your glasses the black chips turn into snub nosed crocodiles.... (117)

Height and size, not to say distance apart, the landscape cannot be mistaken for a benign English landscape. The black chips on the river banks turning out to be crocodiles only hint at the danger that dogs man at every step in the tropics.

Del Mar remarks on the wild animals that are found in Assam:

There is plenty of Big game to be found in Assam, including rhinoceros, elephant, leopards, the wild buffalo, and tigers. Shortly before we came through a man had been found dead on the railway, mauled by a tiger, and we saw the body of a leopard which was killed on the line only a few hours before we arrived there. (109)

Apart from the danger of wild animals, Del Mar appears to also suggest the scope for Big game hunting in Assam in keeping with other colonial pursuits.

*The Romantic East* is basically about Del Mar's search for the romance of the Orient. In Assam, he finds not romance but commercial prospects. He depicts Assam as a prospective trade zone although remote and without human enterprise other than that of the British.

All these texts are different from those discussed in the previous chapters in that the so called diplomacy peculiar to the other colonial texts is rarely seen in these texts as the writers openly express their views. They present an image of the indigenous people depending upon their personal experiences which at times present contrasting views on the same subject. In fact, one individual's experiences and encounters with the same tribe mark different impressions which complicate the process of representation and reconstruction. At the same time, the chapter shows that given the chance to look beyond traditional colonial appendages, men and women look at the 'other' as human and subject to human foibles and frailties. While there is no consistent pattern in the presentation of such 'affective possibilities,' the fact that this happens in some of the narratives discussed above, is significant. In this way, the authors present varied representations of the 'other.' Each of these narratives shows how personal stories and ethnographical or scientific reports can be combined to meet the needs of colonial discourse and at the same time, reach beyond it towards anticipating affective communities.

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