

CONCLUSION

The personnel of imperialism in their travels provide a wonderfully rich criss-cross patterning over the crucial issues and themes of the period. (Peter Hulme and Russell McDougall ed. *Writing, Travel And Empire* 7)

If in the early stages of ‘discovery,’ cartography and navigation had been the key sciences related to imperial expansion, by the nineteenth century botany and ethnology went alongside the development and expansion of colonial possessions, botany producing much economically important information while ethnology was crucial for the native administration which would produce peaceful conditions in the Empire and, where necessary, a compliant workforce. (Peter Hulme and Russell McDougall 10)

Personal narrative is a conventional component of ethnographies. It turns up almost invariably in introductions or first chapters, where opening narratives commonly recount the writer's arrival at the held site, for instance, the initial reception by the inhabitants, the slow, agonizing process of learning the language and overcoming rejection, the anguish and loss at leaving. Though they exist only on the margins of the formal ethnographic description, these conventional opening narratives are not trivial. They play the crucial role of anchoring that description in the intense and authority-giving personal experience of fieldwork. Symbolically and ideologically rich, they often turn out to be the most memorable segments of an ethnographic work. (Pratt, James Clifford and George E. Marcus ed. *Writing Culture* 31)

This thesis argues that colonial travel narratives on India are grounded in the project of Empire. Whether it is the colonial administrators, the American missionaries, the people writing about their experiences in the tea plantations or the different professionals—surveyors, engineers, doctors, botanists and such scientific travellers—the ultimate commitment is always to Empire, despite some of them entering into ambivalent friendships or forging affective communities. Drawing upon the tropes of ‘anti-conquest’ suggested by Mary Louise Pratt, or the rejection of imperial binaries through a ‘politics of friendship’ or ‘affective communities’ posited by Leela Gandhi, or the placing of scientific and other ethnographic travel reports within colonial epistemology as suggested by David Arnold, this thesis shows that all the colonial travel narratives examined in the various chapters resort to a rhetoric of otherness directly or indirectly.

Whether as collaborators or as critics, they engage with the indigenous ‘other’ from their European vantage points. As far as they are concerned it is always the European ‘self’ versus the indigenous ‘other’ in their narratives taken as a part of European knowledge systems.

The individual chapters work through contrapuntal readings opposing the colonial binaries of Manichaeism. The rhetoric of othering and the counter rhetoric of blame are made to work in a space which is free from exclusive absolutes, eschewing imperialism and nationalism, to move towards the ‘affectiveness’ posited by Leela Gandhi. Each of the chapters shows how the narratives in question operate between the signposts of Empire and its shades of anti-conquest on one hand, and in-betweenness and affectiveness on the ‘other.’

From the discussions in the earlier chapters, it is clear that the colonial travellers writing on Assam present an ambivalent position on representing the ‘other.’ The differences in their opinion regarding the colonized subject not only show their individual subject positions, implicated as they are in the discourse of Empire in their representations but also problematize the whole issue. The colonialist agenda or instinct is always there as the travellers engage in the process of naming and ‘othering’ the Orient; it is the modes of othering that have made their groups as well as accounts peculiar.

In chapter 2, the narratives are characterized by an apparent colonialist agenda although depending on the moods and experiences of the authors their representations of the ‘other’ vary. Most of them put faith in their administration and try to establish the government as the protector. The texts show either a defence of colonialism in the region or the need for colonial intervention. However, it again varies depending upon the purpose of the writing. For instance, in Mackenzie this tendency is not so prominent since his focus was not on celebrating colonialism before the world but to help other British officials to understand the ‘other.’ Similarly, Fuller’s notes attest to his personal achievements as a colonial administrator despite his comments on the manners and customs of the indigenous people. Although they are not disdainful towards the local people, and at times, appreciate them, the administrators seem to reach out to the ‘other’ within the framework of a ‘superior self,’ that is, the imperial government. Despite their fruitful and interesting interaction, not to say negotiations with the colonized subjects or with those who remain outside the periphery, these writers cannot isolate themselves

from their identities as British subjects and in different ways manage to either defend or endorse the British control of Assam within which the indigenous people are still seen as the 'other.'

Chapter 3 shows that the Missionaries' accounts differ from those of the administrators in that the former's main concern is religious rather than political. The administrators tried to focus on the superiority of the colonizers over the 'natives' and likewise, the missionaries endeavoured to establish the supremacy of Christianity over other religious faiths. However, in doing so, the missionaries always show some kind of affinity with the administration although, overtly at least, theirs was a completely independent institution. In fact, their arrival in Assam was a strategy on the part of the colonial government as their American identity could be a semblance to the 'natives.' The missionary writers aimed at religious hegemony and thereby colonial hegemony as well. This is very clear in their narratives discussed in the chapter.

Missionary literature in a way was an endeavour to legitimize the activities of the Mission. Since the writing was meant for the European readers the issues dealt with in those accounts were also to draw the attention of the Europeans to those subject matters. In their narratives, therefore, an attempt to appease the colonial government is inherent. Missionary travel writing on Assam justified the contributions of the Mission to the indigenous society as well. Although the Mission was no longer a direct part of the colonial policy still it was not altogether separate from the administration; or rather, the Mission did not consider itself to be a separate body independent of the colonial government. Therefore, it was a conscious and careful attempt on the part of the missionaries to justify their actions. It is not only the rhetoric of 'anti-conquest' but their narratives also reveal a double purpose of persuading the colonial government to support vernacular language and the founding of Christian schools to facilitate hegemonic control.

In chapter 4, the relationship between planter and worker is presented in terms of an affective community with a mutual recognition of their own limitations. Somehow the perspective that comes across in is always that of the superior White man being bountiful to the indigenous workers who should have no grounds for complaint. The tea planter, despite heavily loaded odds against his work, enjoys certain advantages in terms of freedom and lack of rigid official procedure and decorum, common in England. Most of

the narratives discuss the hindrances standing in the way of the development of the Indian tea industry, the different shortcomings in the whole system of running a plantation, and the troubles faced by the tea planters in the tea districts of Assam.

While these skills are enough to acquit himself honourably in the colony/ tea plantation, they sometimes appear inadequate in English society. The planter remains a boss in his estate, and his being White opens up certain doors for him which is sadly missing in England. Being White back home is not enough. The peculiarities of life in the tea districts enable planters to speak upon this subject with much deeper feeling as pointed out by one planter. It is the colonial who learns of the prestige attached to Whiteness.

It may be noted that the planters share with the missionaries, this inclination to use the local language. They believe that language difficulties are the result of an inability to grasp or articulate matters. Against government policies, they insist upon the efficacy of the local language not only to make their commands understood but also to reach out to the maximum number of people including the labourers.

This chapter also highlights the representation of the transcultured 'other' in the texts. It gives a clearer picture of the clashes and conflicts within the colonial world. As the tea gardens could be looked at as the epitome of the colonial condition they were also the physical 'contact zone' or the space where the two groups meet. Some of these conditions obtaining in the contact zone are operative within the tea garden as well. The world within the tea garden, cut off from the rest of the world, becomes a site of colonization where people from disparate places and cultures meet within the isolation of the tea plantation and enter into relations determined by a power structure.

Chapter 5 discusses some narratives written by people who were not directly linked with the colonial administration. The significance of this group lies in that their distance from the colonial government in fact provided them a free space to speak about the 'natives.' For instance, the writers are more open about their impression of the travelled region and people. The diplomacy found in the administrators, or the binarism of the missionaries or tactics adopted by the other writers to legitimize colonialism is almost absent in the narratives written by the travellers included in this group. Hamilton recommends that 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. Griffith fulfils the designated role of the scientific traveller where he reports on

both tea and rubber growing in Assam and takes time to comment on the weather conditions, the topography, the transport system, the people and culture and obviously the trade prospects in the region. Griffith's colonialist position is clearer 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. 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.

Pollok fills in the role of the colonial hunter who makes a passion of this sport whenever he can accommodate it along with his daily job of road laying across several districts of Assam. 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. Often he openly shows his prejudices against the 'other' and states his view regarding the latter's inferiority. Pollock undermines the philanthropic policy of colonialism as he openly denounces the civilizing mission and wishes for establishing a master-slave relationship in the country. 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.

Newcombe's narrative, thus, is an obvious attempt to celebrate colonialism in Assam and India at large. The focus is on the role of the British government as reformer. In his representation, the 'native' is a simple and primitive creature confined in age old customs, who also lacks 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 is open enough to celebrate colonialism whereas Del Mar seems to be more concerned about the commercial prospects in the region.

Del Mar shows that the people in the tea gardens live in a world cut off from the rest of civilization. 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.' 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. In Assam, Del Mar 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.

The writers are ostensibly subjective and therefore the differences in describing the same people are apparent too. This group of people, miscellaneous as they are, provides varied representations of the native 'other.' However, the colonialist instinct is always present in their expression which is the common feature that unites them all.

A colonialist prejudice is definitely at work while representing Assam and its people. It is certain that the writers had presumptions about the region which led many of them to give self-contradictory statements. The travellers tend to generalize and whenever they see something negative in the 'other,' they come to the conclusive remark that that was common in every 'native' individual. They failed to comprehend the disparity amongst different indigenous communities and projected them as one community with common cultural ways.

All the groups discussed in this dissertation show colonial prejudice while representing the 'native.' Some of the travellers are mild whereas some others are aggressive in their treatment of the 'other' but their conclusive remarks ultimately endorse the colonialist project. They all confirm colonialist instinct in their descriptions. They adopt strategies to ascertain the inferior status of the 'other' against the superior 'self.' In doing so, they often make misconceptions, misrepresentations, inconsistency and more importantly, self-contradictions. This makes the colonial writers' position ambivalent while creating a confusing image of the 'native.' The ambivalence can be regarded as a colonial strategy or as JanMohamed points out, a colonial duplicity. It emerges from this reading that the colonial travel writer engages in 'anti-conquest,' only to project a decidedly 'inferior' 'other.' Clearly, these writings seek to legitimize the colonialist project, however limited

the effect. Colonial travel and travel writing can therefore be seen simultaneously as masks and masques of conquest.