CHAPTER ONE

POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION IN COLONIAL TRAVEL NARRATIVES: TYPES AND TROPES

COLONIAL DISCOURSE TAKES OVER AS IT TAKES cover. It implicitly claims the territory surveyed as the colonizer's own; the colonizer speaks as an inheritor whose very vision is charged with racial ambition. Simultaneously, however, this proprietary vision covers itself. It effaces its own mark of appropriation by transforming it into the response to a putative appeal on the part of the colonized land and people. This appeal may take the form of chaos that calls for restoration of order, of absence that calls for affirming presence, of natural abundance that awaits the creative hand of technology. Colonial Discourse thus transfers the locus of desire onto the colonized object itself. It appropriates territory, while it also appropriates the means by which such acts of appropriation are to be understood. (David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire* 28)

The use of words 'we' and 'they' in the dominant discourse reinforces the dominant status of white people through categorising 'others' as outsiders. The 'we' in dominant discourse assumes that those it is communicating with are those who share the same category. (Wemyss, *The Invisible Empire* 86)

[P]ersonal narrative is a conventional component of ethnographies….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. (Pratt, "Fieldwork in Common Places," Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture* 31- 32)

The aim of this chapter is to map the foundation for any study of travel writing as a genre. It examines the reliability of travel narratives and the politics of representation within travel writing. It is seen that the travel writer engages in constructing a narrative which is not just reportage but more of the traveller's structured account about things seen and experienced. A significant part of any study of travel writing is to see the layers of information that these narratives offer. Once, however, ideology comes into play, the whole subject gets problematized since the genre is then seen as an effective apparatus for the colonial project. Travel writing could be used in the representation or rather, the construction of the 'other' as it gives the impression of having empirical evidence for the claims it makes. In the colonial travel writings, it served as machinery in legitimating the

imperial project. This is seen in the colonial travel narratives on Assam included in this study where the textuality and layering point to an imperial design. The dissertation draws upon the contentions of key postcolonial thinkers as well as contemporary travel theorists like Tim Youngs and Peter Hulme, Mary Louise Pratt, David Spurr, Graham Huggan and Carl Thompson.

The theory of the colonial 'other' always carries an obvious negative connotation about the status of the object itself. In postcolonial criticism, this image has been observed and studied as a construct of European ethnocentrism. As Bhabha points out: "The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction" (*Location* 70). The dependency of the colonizer's 'self' on the structuring of the colonized 'other' problematizes the whole colonial discourse. This also leads to the emanation of the strife between the colonized and colonizing communities. Aime Cesaire offers a critique of this issue in his essay "Discourse on Colonialism" (1955). Cesaire focuses on the denigration of the colonized 'other' by the colonizers who claimed to bring civilization into the colonized region. According to him, there was an infinite distance between civilization and colonization. He sees no human contact between the colonizer and the colonized but "relations of domination and submission" where the latter is wiped out and robbed of their culture, religion, beliefs and ways of life. An interesting point made by Cesaire is the effect of colonialism. According to him, in his treatment of the natives as animals the colonizer himself becomes an animal. He states:

> The colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform himself into an animal. It is this result, this boomerang effect of colonization that I wanted to point out. (5)

Cesaire believes that even the most civilized person gets affected by the evils of colonial power as it has the tendency to dehumanize whoever is touched by it. It is clear that one of the ways in which colonialism perpetuates evil in the world is by transforming the colonized into non- or subhuman species.

Frantz Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), analyzes the effects of colonization and its psychological legacy felt in a post-colonial society. He calls the colonial world "a

Manichaean world" (*Wretched* 31). This Manichaeanism, Fanon says, dehumanizes the 'native' and turns him into an animal. The colonizer depicts the 'native' as the 'other' which equates evil and associates every negative quality in contrast to the colonialist 'self.'

'Othering' the colonized was done as part of the colonial project to legitimize the conduct of agents of imperialism in the colonized region. Postcolonial critics like Edward Said have addressed this issue with great rigour, at least while analyzing literary texts of the colonial period. Their endeavour is not only a theoretical resistance to imperialism but also to explore further ramifications.

The Other at Home and Abroad

In *Orientalism* (1978), for example, Said discusses the othering of the Orient elaborately. He points out the fact that both the Orient and the occident are constructs. They support and reflect each other. It is actually nothing but the construct of the European who in order to establish their own superior existence have created the Orient. This draws back to what Michel Foucault called cultural imperialism, which carries with it the idea of master-slave discourse. The relational entities of the master and his slave thus get reflected in the occident and the Orient. The western 'self,' believed to be representing the positive, is known in relation to the Oriental 'other' who is credited with all negative traits. It signifies a relationship based on power of dominance and hegemony where the west is the privileged 'self' to exercise that power on the submissive east. Said calls it the process of 'Orientalizing':

> The Orient was Orientalized not only because it was discovered to be "Oriental" in all those ways considered commonplace by an average nineteenth century European, but also because it could be – that is, submitted to being – made Oriental. (6)

Said sees it as a valuable sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient. According to him, the knowledge of the Oriental by the West is only a western way of looking at the former. When a Westerner talks about the Orient he assumes the superiority of his nation and the inferiority of the 'other.' In the colonial representation, this subjectivity always works in the depiction of the 'native.'

Bhabha observes that all such representations of the 'other' are ideologically manipulated or constructed. According to him, because of such positioning, there is a tendency to resort to 'stereotypes' which he identifies as a "major discursive strategy.... a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated..." (*Location* 66). Bhabha further contends that:

> To judge the stereotyped image on the basis of a prior political normativity is to dismiss it, not to displace it....with the repertoire of positions of power and resistance, domination and dependence that constructs colonial identification subject (both colonizer and colonized). (*Location* 67)

Stereotyping may be seen as a defensive trope intended to avoid uncomfortable equations and assessments as colonial discourse tends to be informed by 'a range of differences and discriminations' (67). The Manichean equation suggested by JanMohamed can be cited here to show how the assessments by coloniser and colonised draw upon mutually exclusive categories marked by power and resistance as well as domination and dependence as Bhabha holds.

Abdul R. JanMohamed explores some important aspects of the way of othering in colonialist literature. Like Fanon, JanMohamed too calls the power-relation in the colonial society a Manichean opposition. In his essay, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature" (1985), JanMohamed discusses different factors behind the construction of the 'other' in colonialist narratives. According to him, attention only to the political and cultural aspects gives closure to the subject and interrupts the analysis of colonialist discourse. He suggests that the dominant relations that control the text within the colonialist context are determined by economic and political imperatives and changes. In other words, it is ideology and economic interests that determine the representation of the 'other' in colonialist literature.

Drawing attention to the covert and overt aims of colonialism, JanMohamed says:

> While the covert purpose is to exploit the colony's natural resources thoroughly and ruthlessly through the various imperialist material practices, the overt aim, as articulated by colonist discourses, is to "civilize" the savage, to introduce him to all the benefits of "Western Culture." ("Economy" 62)

This can be understood by distinguishing the material from discursive practices. The representation of the 'other' has to match the overt aim with the covert, so that colonial occupation of other people's territories looks logical. JanMohamed says, for instance, that the ideological function of colonialist texts, therefore, must be understood in terms of the exigencies of European politics and culture. Any attempt to analyze colonial texts must therefore look at the ways in which the 'dominant' and the 'hegemonic' phases work in colonialism. In the dominant phase, the colonialists subjugate the 'natives' with the efficacy of their technically superior military force. By contrast, the hegemonic phase starts with the 'natives' acceptance of the colonizer's entire system including the mode of production. In the latter, the primary aim of the colonialist is to disguise the real aim of colonialism by manipulating the public mind and circulating its aims in such a way that they look like the aims of the colonized people.

JanMohamed points out the nature of its audience and how it played a very significant role in the shaping of the colonial narratives. He explains:

> Since the object of representation – the native – does not have access to these texts (because of linguistic barriers) and since the European audience has no direct contact with the native, imperialist fiction tends to be unconcerned with the truth value of its representation. ("Economy" 63)

The narratives were meant for the readers who stayed in the mother country and therefore their epistemological make-up—framing the 'self' and the 'other'—was a major area of concern and point of contention. The image of the degraded 'other' was important in order to satisfy and perpetuate the prejudice of the homeland audiences. The colonial narratives, therefore, represent the natives as stereotyped object and use them as a resource for colonialist literature. JanMohamed says that 'once reduced to his exchange-value in this system,' the 'native' is 'fed into the Manichean allegory' (64).

This cultural exigency denotes the essentiality of the European ways as the defining marker in the measurement of the native's stature. The colonizers' cultural values and mannerisms were the yardsticks to know the position of the 'other' in the scale of hierarchy. Jyotsna Singh, in her *Colonial Narratives/ Cultural Dialogues* (1996), takes up from JanMohamed. She argues that the English travellers always had a naturalized belief in the superiority of Christendom over 'heathens,' totally ignoring the possibility that the latter could be morally superior to the former. Coming to the context of India,

Singh believes that the British travellers projected the country in terms of otherness and alterity. They took their own culture as the defining norm and in opposition to the 'uncivilized' practices of the natives. Such representation helps the colonialists to justify their activities as the white man's burden.

Singh highlights the imagination of the colonialists who claimed to 'discover' lands for their own use and benefit. They present the newly 'discovered' lands as empty space, a tabula rasa on which they could inscribe their linguistic, cultural and territorial claim. Singh observes:

> these narratives point to the power of a colonizing imagination which "discovers" new lands via demarcations of identity and difference, often based upon ideological and mythical distinctions between civilization and barbarism and tradition and modernity. (*Colonial* 2)

It was the conviction of the colonizers that they were giving life to the places by representing them as 'discoveries.' She has discussed some such texts where the cultural 'other' is not only exoticized but also demonized.

Singh also talks about the use of English literature in India as part of the grand civilizing mission. For example, she shows how by the mid-nineteenth century, the plays of Shakespeare had already become very popular in the English educated circle of Bengal. It was also the time when promoting English language and literature in India became a part of the official colonial policy. Thus, Shakespeare became a useful device in the process and the educated class became the "conduit of Western thought and class" (*Colonial* 103). Like JanMohamed, Singh too believes that the natives' gradual acceptance of the superiority of the colonizers was secured through cultural hegemonization, which, in turn, made it easier for the colonialists to capture more land and control more people.

Interestingly, this cultural hegemony coupled with religious hegemony is apparent in the colonial travel narratives on Assam. The differences in the two cultures have been pictured and the focus has always been on the superiority of the 'self' against the inferiority of the 'other.' The role of literature in perpetuating colonialism is nowhere as clear as in the fact that it gives great authority to the colonial gaze. As pointed out by Bhabha:

> As a signifier of authority, the English book acquires its meaning after the traumatic scenario of colonial difference, cultural or racial, returns the eye of power to some prior, archaic image or identity. Paradoxically, however, such an image can neither be "original—by virtue of the act of repetition that constructs it—nor "identical—by virtue of the difference that defines it. Consequently, the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference. (*Location* 107)

It follows that the colonial perspective relies on a rhetoric of difference between the subject position of the narrator and the scene described, leading to the production of a mode of authority which Bhabha calls "agonistic (rather than antagonistic)" (108). Moreover, as Bhabha explains, it is this ambivalence that makes the boundaries of colonial positionality—the division of self/other—and the question of colonial power—the differentiation of colonizer/colonized—different from both the Hegelian master/slave dialectic or the phenomenological projection of Otherness. "It is a disjunction produced within the act of enunciation as a specifically colonial articulation of those two disproportionate sites of colonial discourse and power: the colonial scene as the invention of historicity, mastery, mimesis or as the 'other scene' of *Entstellung*, displacement, fantasy, psychic defence, and an 'open' Textuality" (107-8).

The projection of otherness in colonial travel writing owes considerably to the work of Edward Said. This thesis builds on Said's Orientalist frame and examines how travellers and travel writers look at Assam during the colonial period. This is not to say that Said's frame is the only frame available for any critical scrutiny of travel writing and the image of the Other. Said's view of travel is decidedly political, as he is alert to the shifting ideologies of the colonial traveller, where travel is a trope for political domination. As the traveller moves from Europe to non-European destinations—Said is interested in Egypt during and immediately after the Napoleonic Wars—we see a discursive obsession to valorize, justify and universalize Europe (see *Orientalism* 201-225). As Bhabha sees it, the other question is also about difference and hybridity. This is a way that prepares the ground for this critical inquiry.

At the other end of the spectrum is Georges Van den Abbeele's *Travel as Metaphor: From Montaigne to Rousseau* (1991). Abbeele says that travel or voyage has three layers of meaning: 'anthropological', 'commercial' and 'educational' (xv-xvi). Each of these

meanings is an incremental metaphor of human mobility. In the case of anthropological voyage, it is the human *body* that moves along with the human *being*. This journey is metaphorically the journey from birth to death. While the anthropological journey is suggestive of human fulfilment and maturity, it is also accompanied by a sense of anxiety. For, the last journey—death, metaphorically understood—has no return. So there is a second level or type of voyage or travel: the commercial. In the commercial voyage, the movement of the body is neither mandatory nor final. In what is possibly a move to offset the sense of anxiety of the anthropological voyage, Abbeele says, "commerce is predicated precisely upon the going *and* coming of movable objects (the etymological sense of *meubles):* furniture for the house, wheat for the body, and so on" (xvi). As a matter of fact

> In the commercial sense of travel, it is not so much the person that is moved, but things that are moved back *and* forth, the latter being shunted about by a particular type of person, a "mercenary," a word whose primary meaning at this time was still simply that of someone working for monetary remuneration. (Abbeele xvi)

What Abbeele does not make clear here is the fact that in commercial travel, the body is accompanied by goods, often transforming itself and others into goods. The slave trade or colonial trade practices are good examples of this. Most of colonial travel and trade operates at this level. Such voyages have the potential to be predatory, a point not developed by Abbeele.

At the third level, Abbeele places educational voyage that combines the benefits of anthropological and commercial voyage. This mode of travel not only signals and confirms growth and maturity but also incremental status that comes with wealth: "The profits to be gained from travel are as corporeal as they are intellectual or commercial. If travel posits the risk and anxiety of death, it also signals the way to health, wealth, and wisdom. The triple definition of the voyage thus triangulates its object as a zone of potential loss or profit" (xvi). This is crucial in that "if one wants to economize on travel—that is, to minimize its risks and reappropriate any possible loss as profit—one soon discovers that the notion of economy already presupposes that of travel" (xv). Therefore, the role of economic as well as epistemological 'increment' from travelling is central to Abbeele's thesis.

In fact, he offers a Derridean reading of travel writing in terms of a challenge to and reconciliation with '*oikos*' (economy or home), a patriarchal domain of knowledge and power. Once we see travel or voyage as "progress, the quest for knowledge, freedom as freedom to move, self-awareness" (xv), it incrementally becomes a metaphor for moving away from home or *oikos*. To that end travel and travel writing are seen as patricidal exercises—figurative and philosophical—or trajectories of growth away from home. Abbeele is interested in Derrida's comments on Aristotle's definition of metaphor. As Abbeele says, the word metaphor comes from the Greek word *metaphorein* (meaning to transfer or transport). Interestingly, Abbeele refers to the modern Greek word *metafora* (meaning buses or vehicles of public transport), which still carries the modern meaning and the older implication of the word metaphor.

The role of home (*oikos* and *domus*) is crucial in the sense that it signals the beginning and the end of the journey. Abbeele says that the idea of home keeps shifting as one moves from place to place, at once robbing it of its traditionally accepted transcendental nature and potentially opening up the very idea of home to a signifying chain that is validated by the traveller's location at a given point of time. So traveller beginning from London on his/her way to Calcutta may have the sense and security of home in an India-bound ship or in the port city of Bombay or Madras, in each case giving the idea of 'reaching home' a new meaning. This meaning is both destabilizing—in the sense that it is *not* London that one is speaking of—and stabilizing in the sense that it concludes a particular trip or terminates a period of uncertainty that enjoins any movement from point x to y. More importantly the new *locus* gives a sense of *oikos*, however *ad hoc* or temporary. As Abbeele puts it:

> That point then acts as a transcendental point of reference that organizes and domesticates a given area by defining all other points in relation to itself. Such an act of referral makes of all travel a circular voyage insofar as that privileged point or *oikos* is posited as the absolute origin and absolute end of any movement at all. For instance, a journey organized in terms of its destination makes of that destination the journey's conceptual point of departure, its point of orientation. Thus, a teleological point of view remains comfortably within this economic conception of travel. (xviii)

In a literal sense, Abbeele says, metaphor means transport (travel). This is primarily so because the traveller can travel only after breaking or leaving the boundaries of home. So Abbeele, already informed by Derridean deconstruction, begins by asking what seems to be rhetorical question:

> But if the concept of metaphor can be used to effect an economical reduction of tropological difference—that is, if metaphor is to become the *proper* name for every figural impropriety—it can only attain that status metaphorically, by transporting the concept of transportation to that of the text—such a transportation taking place nonetheless within a text and as a text. Travel then becomes the metaphor of metaphor while the structure of the metaphor becomes the metaphor for the travel of meaning. (Abbeele xxiii)

If transportation is the key to the making and meaning of metaphor, Abbeele's reading of travel and writing and its metaphoricity signal a strong antithesis to the imperial realism at work in western travel as seen in the work of Mary Louise Pratt. Abbeele says:

> For the point of return as repetition of the point of departure cannot take place without a difference in that repetition: the detour constitutive of the voyage itself. Were the point of departure and the point of return to remain exactly the same, that is, were they the same point, there could be no travel. Yet if the *oikos* does not remain selfsame, how can one feel secure in it, especially given the fact that this identity of the *oikos* is what is necessarily presupposed by the economic view of travel, the only way we can think a voyage as such? (xix)

As we see it, Abbeele's explication of the metaphor-transportation-travelling continuum is rooted in Derrida's discussion of Aristotle in his "White Mythology" (241; cited in Abbeele xxiii). This also means that

> ... if the concept of metaphor can be used to effect an economical reduction of tropological difference—that is, if metaphor is to become the *proper* name for every figural impropriety—it can only attain that status metaphorically, by transporting the concept of transportation to that of the text—such a transportation taking place nonetheless within a text and as a text. Travel then becomes the metaphor of metaphor while the structure of the metaphor becomes the metaphor for the travel of meaning. And if, as we have seen in our analysis of

travel, the identity of the home is breached by the very movement that constitutes it, are we not entitled to ask if the *metaphorein* of meaning does not have similar consequences for the notion of proper meaning? (Abbeele xiii)

In other words, travel writing can be seen as the field of play in which the meaning of meaning—so central to Derridean thinking on language and philosophy—is both created and erased by travel from one place to another.

In this scheme, Montaigne's travel is marked by "perennial movement" as well as loss and recovery of self through naming, disorientation and re-orientation (8-9). In Montaigne's *Essays*, for example, we get "an interpretation of travel as loss of that identity which should have been assured by the economy of referential identification" (9). In Descartes, however, travel begins with or results in a "tropology of doubt" (41), that leads to a "teleological closure" (42). Both these figures suggest that in the case of Descartes

> this quest takes place via the discursive voyage of the metaphysical meditation, via the itinerary, or *methodus* (a Greek word for a pathway), of methodical doubt. Implied, however, in this metaphor of the road is a certain security, the security by which the subject (of doubt, of travel) can map out where the text (of his doubt) is taking him, can domesticate the text (of his doubt) through a representation of it in spatial or topographical terms. (44)

Here doubt is related to a trajectory of knowledge and recovery, in the sense that doubt triggers a movement away from the security of home and domesticity. Once the quest is complete, the role of doubt in self-knowledge is one of freedom rather than imprisonment in topographical terms.

This idea that travel is the key to the self's imprisonment and freedom from thought emerges in Montesquieu's accounts of his Grand tour. Abbeele identifies a significant trait in Montesquieu's tour of Rome:

> There are at least three different views of the city: (1) the initial, elevated view of the "entire ensemble"; (2) the sight of the "parts" seen up close and one at a time in the order of a tourist's itinerary; (3) the repetition of the first view in order to "fix down [one's] ideas." (66)

This view of the three views is important in travel writing in that it encapsulates the epistemic shift in a traveller's consciousness during the process. Interestingly, this moment is also indicative of the condition and consequence of the European traveller's gaze through the colonial world. Behind each of the *oikos*-breaking impulses Abbeele sees a contest with a patriarchal authority that does not allow the self to move out and explore. Writers like Montaigne, Descartes and Montesquieu challenge their *oikos,* and write books. As they write, Abbeele suggests, they also challenge traditions of writing, thus expanding their idea of home, moving from oikos to ecriture (see 124-25).

The final act of the drama, however, is played out in Rousseau's autobiographical texts. In Rousseau, for example, the travelling self is substituted by a travelling consciousness that revisits different pints of its growth. As this is not possible in terms of physical movement, the journey in Rousseau is a journey in time, consciousness and writing. In other words, there is a substitution of place by writing. This poses a new challenge to any presentation of travel as metaphor. So Abbeele says:

> If the signature that is the writer's particular mode of travel would seem to convert the banal trope of the voyage into something he can call his own, the anxieties associated with that signature, as revealed most overtly in Rousseau, point to the dread detour that the detour of travel is meant to circumvent: namely, woman, whose difference is as unmasterable for the male philosopher as the *oikos* is unstabilizable for the traveler. (130)

In other words, writing is the new travel where language is both 'home' and 'abroad'. In other words, one's experience—home, in the sense that it is one's own experience—becomes an alien territory by transforming itself into language, an unfamiliar form. This mode of travel is likely mode to negate the predatory nature of travel seen in Montaigne, Descartes and Montesquieu. The change in what was an implied challenge to "a woman...unmasterable for the male philosopher" brings to full circle the oedipal warfare that makes travel possible in the first place. The quest for wealth so central to travel can also be seen as a metaphorical quest. This thesis shows how the ambiguous relation of travel and travel writing to wealth seeking and wealth production finds a new resonance in colonial travel writing.

The positionality of self/other or power equations in colonial discourse is not necessarily exclusive categories nor are the relations in inverse variation. The epistemology of doubt

generated by the colonial landscape or object is therefore best seen as ambivalent and rhetorical. All representations of the colonial scene have to accommodate some kind of construction by way of displacement, enhancement, reification making way for layers of signification or 'open textuality' as Bhabha says. Colonial articulations of the possessed site or those calling for colonial intervention through mastery and mimicry are forced into ambivalence by the troublesome nature of the rhetoric. Such ambivalence leads Bhabha to suggest that the identity is fixed through "a fantasy of difference" (*Location* 18).

In continuation of the mapping of culture and travel writing, where travel is simultaneously expressive of colonial allegory and ethnographic anxiety, Clifford in his "Notes on Travel and Theory" (1989) develops an analogy between the travel writer and the postcolonial theorist. Both, Clifford holds, draw their power from location. He cites Edward Said's "Travelling Theory" (1983) and Adrienne Rich's "Notes Toward a Politics of Location" (1984). Both writers work on location—both in conceptual and experiential terms—to valorize its power and to foreground its denial. In other words, as Clifford says, commenting on a major issue in Rich's essay:

> "Location," here, is not a matter of finding a stable "home" or of discovering a common experience. Rather it is a matter of being aware of the difference that makes a difference in concrete situations, of recognizing the various inscriptions, "places," or "histories" that both empower and inhibit the construction of theoretical categories like "Woman," "Patriarchy," or "colonization," categories essential to political action as well as to serious comparative knowledge. "Location" is thus, concretely, a *series* of locations and encounters, travel within diverse, but limited spaces. ("Notes" 4)

It is clear that "location ... is a dynamic awareness of discrepant attachments" as it suggests "a constrained, empowering locus of historically-produced connections and differences" (4). Said's essay, Clifford says, "challenges the propensity of theory to work seek a stable place" (4). The search for stability eclipses what Said callas "non-linearity" (see Clifford 4). What Clifford has in mind is Said's critique of master narratives of loss and empowerment in Western theory, presented without respect to location and difference. So Said "proposes a series of important questions about the sites of production, reception, transmission and resistance to specific theories" (4). To this

30

extent, the postcolonial condition as evident in the writings of critics as divergent as Cornel West, Gayatri Chakraborty Spivack, Trin T. Minh-ha, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, to name a few, is "a place of *betweenness,* a hybridity composed of distinct, historically-connected postcolonial spaces" (5).

Clifford's analogy between theory and travel writing rests on ability of the theorist and the travel writer to address "their productions as inescapably political, written against and for, in concrete situations of indentification, opposition, alliance" (7). Even as the travel writer writes about 'abroad', she/he is not free from the reflections of 'home', in the process putting the writing in a position that is both an extension of and antithesis to reflexes of home.

A Discourse of Persuasion and Dominance

Colonial travel narratives invariably created a discourse of persuasion that worked well with larger goals of dominance and submission. Nayar has explored different discourses of colonialism in his book *Colonial Voices: The Discourses of Empire* (2012). He calls it a one sided view which shows the power relations that mark colonialism. He states:

> Colonial discourse masks the power relations between races, cultures and nations. It makes the relations seem natural, scientific and objective. Colonial discourse therefore produces stereotypes from within European prejudices, beliefs and myths. (*Colonial* 3)

Nayar echoes JanMohamed when he terms the philanthropic project of the colonialist a masquerade which actually gave them power over the 'natives.' He speaks about the textual archive the Britishers built up about India which basically focused on the tyranny of the local monarchs and the pathetic state of the 'native' subjects. These were in fact justifications for the colonial takeover. Nayar describes these textual archives as discursive apparatus. These discursive apparatus are apparent in colonial narratives on Assam as well. The travel writers highlight the brutality of the Ahom rulers against a peaceful environment restored by the British rule. By doing this, the writers not only reflected the philanthropic image of the colonizers but also established them as rescuers of the 'native' subject from oppression.

Such representation refers to the difference between the colonizer and the colonized. Nayar calls it a discourse of difference which actually was meant for the construction of the 'other.' Nayar remarks:

> It is important to see the construction of difference as a colonial move: showing how India was inferior enabled the English to justify colonial dominance as necessary for its "improvement." (*Colonial* 62)

The focus in the colonial representations was always on the loss which was caused by cruel 'native' monarchs. This was meant to situate India in direct contrast to England. This was in fact a colonialist agenda which could be found in most of the narratives. It helped the British people in self-fashioning as rescuers of the 'native' subject from their brutal monarchs.

The discourse of difference highlights the cultural differences. The colonial writers showed much interest in the culture of the 'natives.' Rampant social ills were emphasized which called for a reforming program of improving those "lower" races and cultures. Nayar remarks:

> The discourse of reform, rescue, native savagery, and Christian virtue constructed the contexts, justification, and ideological foundations for the moment of interventionist legislation, political decisions, and other colonial acts. (*Colonial* 61-62)

So it can be said that the power of colonialism is rooted in cultural conquest. The recurrence of a rhetoric of renovation of the colony and its landscape is therefore a secure way of self-legitimizing. Literature highlights the need for the transformation of culture in the native social sphere. For example, gardening emerges as a way of asserting control over the 'native' landscape.

The reformation project involved the participation of the white women. The white women got horrified by the primitive and superstitious ways of the Oriental women. They therefore took the responsibility to rescue those women from their age old ignorance and servitude. The focus was on the evil practices like widow burning and female infanticide. Colonial reform helped both men and women in self-fashioning. They could create their image as humanitarians or activists. The same can be said when they represent the 'other' as the wild and therefore dangerous. The accomplishment of the

colonial people in those dangerous places or the dreaded wilderness helped the colonialists create their images as adventurous and brave people. The representation of the 'other' was thus a mode of self-fashioning, and in case of colonial narratives, it was always the superior 'self.'

So it is important to examine the history of travellers 'discovering' places. It is seen that the seventeenth century travellers were not colonials but merchants who had no intention of dominating a people and the landscape. It is in the eighteenth century that the travel narratives got institutionalized. It became a quest for the unknown, the novel or the strange and a discourse of discovery. But discovering empty land could not be applied to the discovery of India as it was already occupied by great dynasties and ethnic-cultural groups—Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims—for thousands of years.

However, this was not the case with Assam and the North Eastern part of India. The North East was a difficult terrain for people from other parts of India to trade or work in. Assam was the unknown 'other' for the rest of India, a sentiment that was fully exploited by the British. Assam offered the explorer-colonialist vast tracts of empty landscape to discover and cultivate for their own commercial benefit.

The Geographical Imagination

The 'discovery' of the colonized region involves more critical aspects in the colonial discourse. The empty lands or as Jyotsna Singh observes, the 'tabula rasa' denotes spatiality in colonialism. In fact, colonial geography and its representation in colonial writings are integral parts in the study of colonialism. In colonial discourse, place, politics and identity intersect which play a definite role in the representation of the 'other.' The economic factor is always associated with the colonial interest in the geography of the native region. Therefore, geographical description, landscape and space or rather 'empty space' remain the impetus that shape the colonial stance in the narratives.

Alison Blunt and Cheryl McEwan, in *Postcolonial Geographies* (2002), explore the geographical aspects of colonial discourse. They highlight the geographical ideas that have been instrumental in articulating different colonial experiences. Blunt and McEwan say:

Postcolonialism and geography are intimately linked. Their intersections provide many challenging opportunities to explore the spatiality of colonial discourse, the spatial politics of representation, and the material effects of colonialism in different places. (*Postcolonial* 1)

Therefore, the significance of geography, as they hold, is always at the centre of postcolonial critical study. They point out that

the imperial production of geographical knowledge through, for example, school textbooks, exploration and fieldwork; geographies of encounter, conquest and colonization; geographies of colonial representation, particularly in travel writing, photography, maps and exhibitions; the production of space in colonial and postcolonial cities; the gendered, sexualized and racialized spaces of colonialism, colonial discourse and postcoloniality; and geographies of diaspora and transnationality through the movement of people, capital and commodities. (*Postcolonial* 2)

Blunt and McEwan address postcolonialism "as a geographically dispersed contestation of colonial power and knowledge" (3). Such geographies of power and knowledge as part of the discourse of colonialism, occupy prime space in travel writing. This is evident in the colonial narratives on Assam where surveyors, engineers and cartographers have much to contribute as they construct their texts/narratives and maps. The act of demarcation—excluding and including people, places and things at will—set the tone for the nature and tenor of colonial travel narratives and histories.

In colonial narratives, geography and space play significant roles so far as the capitalist aspect is concerned. In the colonial narratives on Assam, 'empty space' and a picturesque landscape served as the tempting elements. The writers appreciate the beautiful landscapes and hint at the prospect of founding a colony for the Europeans. The 'empty spaces' get highlighted without the interruption of the 'natives' presence which invite the colonizers to come and settle in the region. They also implicate an imaginative geography which is in store for their future. This imaginative location is inhabited by European population gradually wiping out the indigenous inhabitants. In the urban areas, this imaginative location was realized through the transformation of the places. Material developments, gardening, building of houses etc. were the ways in which this reality was confirmed. According to Blunt and McEwan, geographies of colonial representation,

particularly in travel narratives and other graphical depiction is a key theme of postcolonial geography.

The Travelling Gaze

Along with colonial geography, what is important is colonial landscape and the emergence of "traveling gaze." David Arnold in *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze* (2005), has extensively talked about this. He observes the European responses to unfamiliar landscape where he explores it as 'an object of colonial fear and desire, utility and aesthetics' (3). According to him, it is the 'tropics' rather than the Orient that the colonizers were more concerned about as the former refers to the environment and not the culture. He, therefore, prefers to call the process "tropicalization" rather than Orientalism. His use of the phrase the 'traveling gaze' is actually a reference to Foucault. He explains,

> In this Foucauldian sense "the gaze" ranges from the disciplining power of constant monitoring and surveillance (as over prisoners or hospital inmates) to the investigative, ordering, and interpretative intelligence that pervades the practice of a modern science like botany and zoology. (*Tropics* 28)

Arnold holds that "the gaze" is about material and institutional possession. Further, it is about surveillance and scrutiny, about ordering and interpretative intelligence that pervades modern science. What he means is that the gaze is never casual or random or passive without direction or end. 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:

> External to the cultural and physical landscape through which the European traveled, this scientific and scenic gaze was itself an ordering, even disciplining mechanism that edited as well as elicited information and actively meddled in the construction of the knowledge it sought to shepherd and cajole into meaningful shapes and approved scientific forms. (*Tropics* 31)

It is the landscape that is subject to the 'traveling gaze.' However, 'the gaze' has its contradictory role which is familiarizing the exotic through a process of attaching to it European cultural norms while at the same time, emphasizing the alien nature of the

35

tropical landscape. Hence, the transforming of landscape was done in a particular design. Arnold writes:

> But, in general, landscape and nature were reinterpreted in terms that were essentially western in character, and scenic vistas, like colorful plants and curious animals, became annexed to an aesthetic and morality that were alien to India but more accessible to European observer. (67-68)

This transformation and its representation in the travel literature highlight the contradictory role of the 'traveling gaze.' Europe's romanticism of India as a land in ruins with old buildings, debris of fort and palaces and thick jungles were applied to the environment. This romancing is always associated with a desire to "improve" both in terms of commerce and aesthetics of landscape.

Arnold discusses some of the travel narratives written by naturalists that represent nature through science, particularly botany. He analyses the scientific lives in the botanical texts. Arnold explores:

> Despite the considerable skill, labor and cost involved in producing botanical illustrations in India, their existence seemed merely to confirm the prevalent impression that colonial botany was inferior to its metropolitan counterpart. (184)

This implies not only condescension but also the logic in favour of colonization of the already designated 'inferior' landscape and geography. Pratt sees 'anti-conquest' in the systematization of nature. According to her, the system of nature created "a Utopian, innocent vision of European global authority," which she refers to "as an anti-conquest" (*Imperial* 39). Drawing attention to the impact of natural history, Pratt suggests:

> natural history provided means for narrating inland travel and exploration aimed not at the discovery of trade routes, but at territorial surveillance, appropriation of resources, and administrative control. (39)

Both Arnold and Pratt seem to be holding similar observations regarding the geographical politics of colonialism and the implementation of the same through science and travel. The fact is that space and territory needed extensive survey before they could be put to use. To this extent, what preceded and followed occupation of land and territory

was a kind of plotting. This 'plotting' was both cadastral and narrative and contributed to the geography of politics and the politics of geography.

The Politics of Spatial Geography

Spatial politics—the idea that space and territory must be statistically measured and discursively neutralized before being taken over—is inevitable to the representation of the native as the 'imagined other.' To the extent that land and territory had to be reappropriated by the colonizer, it had to be denotified regularly and recorded accordingly. It was necessary for the colonialist to construct the 'other' in a certain way in order to define the 'self.' Europe or the West got engaged in the process of self-definition through their representation of the inferior 'other.' Joanne P. Sharp, in *Geographies of Postcolonialism* (2009), offers critical thoughts on the construction of the 'native' as the 'imagined other.' She calls the world of the other a "textualized world" (*Geographies* 12), based on the travellers' imagination rather than observation. It was the tendency in the European travellers to look at the non-European as the different 'other' which distinguished the latter from the European normality. Sharp writes:

> Their main characteristic was their difference from Europeans. Europeans were always seen as the reference point, Europeans always represented what was right and normal. (14)

Thus the yardsticks were already in place even before the object to be analyzed was sighted and chosen. This ensured that the other was presented and projected as lowly and inferior, both in physical and moral terms.

The rise of science and technology was an advantage to the colonizers in this regard. Technology was the basis to know the advanced society; science and scientific ways thus became the terms of measurement. The absence of such measuring systems and units in the indigenous communities and cadastral systems showed was used to frame them as inferior. Sharp observes the way the Orient has been depicted in the colonialists' texts. She sees fractures in the representation itself. In their narratives, colonial travellers present an Orient as a lump, giving it a coherence by harping on its lacks and inadequacies, ignoring the differences of nationality, region, gender, sexuality, class etc. These differences are not taken into account as they challenge the singular preoccupation with 'othering' in the representation of the Orient.

Colonial Landscape

Along with colonial geography what is important is colonial landscape. Sharp brings out several aspects related to the landscapes of power. She analyses the colonial built environment. Native landscape was considered a threat to the colonizers and likewise, urbanity was a threat to the 'natives.' Blunt and McEwan call it, as already discussed, insistence on the realization of the imaginative location through discursive and narrative transformation of land and locations. It is interesting to note that there was always a wall—real or notional—between the built-spaces for the colonizer and the local residents. Sharp states:

> The colonial urbane landscape was hence not simply a surface reflecting the effects of the unequal power relations characterizing colonial societies, but also a resource drawn upon in conflicts involving both colonists and colonized groups. (63)

Thus, the landscape was transformed but not without maintaining the difference between the European and the non-European. The colonists transformed homes into landscapes so that the dweller could be erased and forgotten. On the other hand, they made homes out of landscapes by reproducing 'home' life in the colonies. Hill stations therefore were considered ideal for settling down abroad. The cooler surroundings and climate conditions allowed the settler to bring in 'familiar' props—flower plants, fruit trees and decorative trees and vines—that made it possible for them colonialists to create a 'home' landscape in alien mountain regions. What Sharp highlights here is significant:

> Again we can see the power of colonialism to write meaning onto the native landscape. Here the colonialists were able to domesticate the different landscape to render it in a form that was familiar and known to them. (Sharp 68)

Sharp calls it colonial dominance over the 'native' landscape. The colonialists were domesticated by transforming the foreign place into one with familiar surroundings.

Transformation and restructuring of the exotic and the 'other' was both real and rhetorical need for the colonialist. Hence creating 'abstract spaces'—imagining a homogeneity in landscapes that were contrary to reality—was part of the whole economic project. This abstract and usable space needed abstract bodies with qualities like docility, usefulness, discipline, nation, normality and sexual control. In other words,

abstract bodies like abstract spaces were expected to serve economic, political territorial re-appropriation. Sharp observes, "In short, they were economic investments to be protected and utilized to their greatest capacity" (64). This required cultural transformation of a people, a new de-cultured one who could be beneficial to the colonists. Sharp observes the continuation of imperialism but with a different form in the age of post-colonialism, a thesis well-served since Hardt and Negri's *Empire* (2005).

Colonial Travel

In the last two decades, postcolonial travel theorists have sought to link colonial geography to the representation of the 'other' and have significantly added to our understanding of the subject. Mary Louise Pratt's book remains the most important statement in this field. In her seminal work, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), Pratt coins four key terms that are inevitable in the study of colonial geography: 'contact zone,' 'transculturation,' 'anti-conquest' and 'autoethnography' which she explains in her book. The first three terms are clearly relevant to this study. About 'contact zone,' she writes:

> Contact zones, social spaces where disparate cultures met, clash and grapple with each other, after in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today. (*Imperial* 4)

Pratt refers to the geographical space where two groups meet, in context of this study, the colonizers and the colonized. This is followed by a process of assimilation which is never based on equality but dominance and submission instead. Pratt further explains the term:

> I use to refer to the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict. (6)

Dominance and subordination mark the 'contact zone.' More importantly, it involves an intractable conflict between the 'self' and the 'other' in colonial texts that, in turn, results in the disparagement of the native 'other' by the colonialist 'self.'

According to Pratt, "Transculturation is a phenomenon of the contact zone" (*Imperial* 6). Transculturation refers to the cultural assimilation of the groups in the colonial geographical domain. In the colonial context, transculturation often confers a differential identity to the native 'other' as a result of colonial interaction. Both political and religious hegemony play imperative roles in this process of forming a transcultural identity for the colonized people.

Pratt sees 'anti-conquest' as one of the "strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony" (7). It is in fact a device through which the colonial writers endeavour to establish their superior 'self' against an inferior 'other.' It helps the travellers in applying their tactics in order to legitimate their colonialist project which they pretend to show to be beneficial to both the groups. The travellers try to make their narratives look authentic by introducing an innocent narrator who is seen to be describing the things as they are. Thus, 'anti-conquest' is meant to give a cover to the colonial prejudice or the imperialist instinct in the traveller.

In *Imperial Eyes*, Pratt gives a historical account of travel writing and maps the genre with the beginning of imperialism. She shows how travel and travel writing foreclose an ideology that offers a new orientation towards exploring and documenting continental interiors. She discusses several books by European naturalists (both British and continental) and calls the systematizing of nature "a European project of a new kind, a new form of what one might call planetary consciousness among Europeans" (29). The emergence of travel writing asserted the authority of print and thereby of its controllers. This actually gave the authority of documentation and interpretation to one class of people. Thus, the emergence of travel writing was not only the beginning of European expedition but also the starting of construction of the 'unknown' or the 'other' with a particular perception.

Pratt also examines how eighteenth-century travel accounts on Africa portrayed the travelled region. Like Blunt and McEwan, Pratt also emphasizes the interconnection of geographical knowledge to the exercise and imaginings of colonial power. Pratt shows how these travellers put their effort in setting up a colonized landscape by 'imagining' and 'naturalizing' landscapes.

In many colonial texts, landscapes and natural surroundings constitute the focus to the writers. Sometimes, even inhabited landscapes are described as uninhabited, in the process naturalizing the human world. In these landscapes, traces of people—cleverly fossilized or antiquated—appear regularly but the people would have been obliterated. Often, landscapes and scenes become more visible than villages and villagers. Pratt calls it "textual apartheid" where the authors focus on the "empty landscapes, meaningful only in terms of a capitalist future and of their potential for producing a marketable surplus" (61). Other travellers who spoke about the human world depicted the people as "cultureless beings" hardly passing as humans. Pratt argues that "the complicity of these texts begins in the fact that they portray the African peoples not as undergoing historical changes in their life ways, but as having no life ways at all, as cultureless beings" (53). What is said of Africa is also true of India in certain ways.

This is how the rhetoric of 'anti-conquest' is used to promote the colonization of the 'inferior' beings and to justify the conduct of the colonialists in the travelled region. The panoptic attitude of the colonial traveller is suggestive of the usurpation of colonial geography. Pratt indicates three strategies in the contemporary travel accounts: aestheticizing, density of meaning and domination and a relation of mastery between the seer and the seen. She also remarks that 'the white man's lament' is evident in the representations of all the western writers.

The 'anti-conquest' is a subtle trope of controlling and regulating without fighting. The traveller adopts different tactics by which she/he tries to put together stock images of the Orient. It encrypts complex layers of colonial ideology that tries to show the degraded status of the 'native' through a narrative style that combines supposed objectivity and innocence. As Said says, the 'other' determines the 'self' and vice versa. This representation of the 'other' is also the revelation of the 'self' or rather, different layers of the 'self.' Thus the colonial traveller meets not only the unfamiliar 'other' but also the unfamiliar 'self' or 'selves.' In one of her early essays, Pratt says:

> There [in the imperial frontier] Europeans confront not only unfamiliar others but unfamiliar selves. There they engage in not just the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production but the expansion through displacement of previously established modes. ("Scratches" 121)

This at once suggests the transculturation of the colonizers too. Interestingly, the reading community in the mother country expected to see in these travel accounts only the virtuous white traveller. However, in the 'contact zone,' while going through the process of assimilation, the selves of the white travellers gather transcultural features.

In the context of Assam, the indifference of the planters to the living condition of the workers, and the explicit lack of moral values must be seen along with the lack of human concerns on the part of the administrator, who refuses to acknowledge the human other in the 'native.' Both these reactions seem to be a result of a kind of transculturation that Pratt mentions. The idea is to examine how the narratives explore the differences between the 'self' and the 'other.' This in a way extends to predetermined subject positions and the various ways that are used to justify and familiarize the process of European expansion.

The Language Self and Other

In *The Rhetoric of Empire* (1993), David Spurr argues that in colonial travel writing the difference between the 'self' and the 'other' is represented through a series of strategic rhetorical devices including surveillance, appropriation, aestheticization, classification, naturalization and eroticization, among others. Spurr shows how through a "negative history" (*Rhetoric* 98), an ahistorical notion of the 'savage' gets transformed into the 'other' in the colonial narratives. He shows how such a rhetorical strategy helps western society conceive of the 'other' in terms of absence, emptiness, nothingness or death. Clearly, such structuring of the native in colonial discourses is helpful in creating the 'self' and is created by it. This absence, as suggested by Spurr, has strong link with colonial desire. Desire "is connected to the principle of opposition between absence and presence, between lack and fulfillment" (93). This difference between the two fuels up the desire in the 'self.' However, the relationship between the writer and the colonizer, as Spurr says, is metaphorical as it becomes a question of establishing authority by marking off identity from difference.

On the cultural difference and their representation in the colonial narratives, what Nicholas Thomas says in *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (1994), is pertinent in the study of this project. Thomas calls it rather a religious difference than racial or national. Like Spurr, he too observes that in the colonial

representations, the travellers distanced, denigrated, and then essentialized large and diverse populations. They alternately demonized and domesticated—through exoticization and familiarization—whole places and people.

This familiarizing strategy is seen in the geographical accounts too. Critics like Blunt, McEwan and Sharp have talked about the transformation of the foreign places and alien landscapes with the superimposition of homely surroundings, as already discussed above. This apart, as Thomas points out, there were substitutions and alterations of place names too. The indigenous names of places were substituted by Western and Christian names. There were depictions and documentations through such media as colonial reports, artifact collections as well as actual paintings, drawings and photography. They always focus on two things: the horrors of the past and the happiness of the Christian present. In the missionaries' narratives it was in fact the main theme. Thomas comments on this:

> The social process of conversion and development of a new Christian society in the native land is thus represented as dyadic affair: the missionaries on one side show the light and provide guidance, while on the other native respond to the dawn and happily learn to work within the new order. (*Colonialism* 139-40)

The missionaries were represented as moral and intellectual supervisors, and yet they cared for the natives. Thomas states:

> … projects are often projected rather than realized; because of their confrontations with indigenous interests, alternate civilizing missions and their internal inconsistencies, colonial intentions are frequently deflected, or enacted farcically and incompletely. (*Colonialism* 106)

This looks like a realization of what Pratt calls anti-conquest. The civilizing mission projected grand schemes which were meant to benefit the local population, but they were never realized.

Colonial Travel and Surveillance

It is significant that missionaries and the colonial administration had a relationship that was neither transparent nor uniformly ordered across the spectrum. As both sought to generate and occupy usable space, it became necessary for one to collaborate with the

other in such areas as education, health and sanitation. On closer scrutiny, it is clear that different policies of health and sanitation were actually means of more general surveillance and intervention. The whole representation of the 'other' was not only a "self-fashioning exercise" but also a coercive ploy. The overt aim of colonialism was a show which was in fact a process of image making.

Thomas says that colonialism's culture should not be seen as a singular discourse. It is a series of projects which involves representations and narratives. In the modern colonial narratives the representation of the natives is of a distinctive nature. They are seen "as heathens but potential Christians, as savages to be wished away, as primitives defined through the negation of modernity and as distinct 'races' or 'cultures' possessing particular natures" (*Colonialism* 190). Thomas opines that the natives are constructed in terms of "Western absences and viewers' interest" (194). However, Thomas thinks that discussions on this colonial representation of the 'other' can be misleading as it also implies recognition. He, therefore, believes in the subversion of colonial discourse in postcolonialism—where the representation of the colonizer and the colonized is left to the native writers—is logical.

Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan have explored similar aspects of travel writing in *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* (1998). Holland and Huggan have regarded travel writing as a very efficient means of exercising ethnocentrism. They have tried to elaborate this feature of the genre in their book. They say:

> Its thesis, unsurprisingly perhaps, is that travel writing frequently provides an effective alibi for the perpetuation or reinstallment of ethnocentrically superior attitudes to "other" cultures, peoples and places. (*Tourists* viii)

This indicates that travel accounts are mere constructs. In the postcolonial context, travel helps the colonizer to maintain his superior image as he draws the 'other' as inferior. Thus, travel involves fiction too. According to Holland and Huggan, travel accounts can be termed as literary artifacts mediating between fact and fiction. Travel provides documents of other people and cultures from the perspective of the traveller and therefore what it presents cannot always be treated as objective. It is a useful medium of satisfying the curiosity of the traveller who is keen to know other places and people.

Travel can also be a cause of estrangement. Again, given that the traveller's perception of the travelled region, it involves manipulation of perspectives on the traveller's part while describing the 'other.' In colonial travel narratives, this aspect is very distinctive as the travel writers try to give a 'structured' image of the native. At times this is done with an explicit purpose, as suggested by Holland and Huggan:

> The subjectivity of travel writing might be seen, in this sense, as a form of willful interference … travel writing enjoys an intermediary status between subjective inquiry and objective documentation. (*Tourists* 11)

Clearly, travel writing does not necessarily offer objective description. In a way, travel reveals features of voyeurism while describing other cultures so that there is scope for manipulation and predatory treatment. It projects fear and fantasies of the ethnicized cultural 'other.' Male fantasies surround the objectified and 'othered' female body. Female fantasies, similarly, 'purify' or demonize the alien male, investing in it a desire that is complex and layered, governed by the principles of eroticization, naturalization and exoticization as seen in the case of landscape. In the postcolonial narratives, this voyeurism is realized in the way the travellers look at the 'debased' native and the 'wasted' virgin land which is given meaning through colonization only.

Holland and Huggan speak about the status of travel writing in the age of postcoloniality. They write:

> Clearly, travel writing at its worst has helped support an imperialist perception by which the exciting "otherness" of foreign, for the most part non-European, peoples and places is pressed into the service of rejuvenating a humdrum domestic culture. (*Tourists* 48)

In other words, in the colonial world, travel could be a tool for the promotion of colonialist projects. It helped in the documentation or in providing manipulated fact and fiction about the culture of the native 'other.' In fact, travel was a political vehicle. Familiarizing the unfamiliar is a common tendency in travel writing and this propensity is revealed in a different way in the colonial narratives. The traveller observes and understands the unfamiliar 'other' in terms of the European familiar. The process of assimilation thus becomes a process of transforming the unknown into the known. Holland and Huggan observe: "When Europe encounters difference, it inevitably sets in

motion a process of assimilating the unfamiliar to the European known." (*Tourists* 88) The colonial traveller seems to interpret 'other' cultures in terms of his/her understanding of his/her culture, which results in deliberate misunderstanding or misinterpretation of foreign cultures. Holland and Huggan call it "Europe's narcissism" which becomes visible in its engagement with 'otherness.' In the postmodern context, however, Holland and Huggan believe that travel has the capacity to open up new epistemological as well as geographical horizons. The 'self' in the travel writing is problematic and instable. It is only a construction which blurs the boundary between fact and fiction.

Carl Thompson offers a fairly detailed analysis of this fictionalizing tendency of travel in his *Travel Writing* (2011). Thompson therefore brings in different generic aspects of travel writing such as the problems of authority, autobiographical elements, ethical and political implications and the gender issue. On the genre and its requirements Thompson says: "all travel requires us to negotiate a complex and sometimes unsettling interplay between alterity and identity, difference and similarity" (*Travel* 9). Thompson sees travel as a negotiation between the 'self' and the 'other': a record of an encounter between the two. In the general sight, it is a report of a people or place. But at a deeper level, it is the revelation of the traveller-narrator's 'self.' It is an articulation of his/her beliefs and ways.

It is interesting to note that Thompson calls travel a 'hybrid genre' that combines different forms of writing such as essays, short stories, diaries, personal notes, etc. Thompson insists on the complexities created by the thin line between fact and fiction in travel writing. The fuzziness of generic boundaries points to other kinds of ambiguities and complexities that go into the making of travel. The traveller plays the roles of both reporter and storyteller. Thompson says: "[C]areful tailoring of the travel account clearly pushes the text in the direction of fiction, even if the writer dies not perpetrate any outright inventions or falsehood" (*Travel* 28). In other words, travel writing presents textual artifacts constructed by writers and publishers. Like Holland and Huggan, Thompson too believes that travel writing provides what Hayden White so tellingly called "fictions of factual representation" (see *Tropics*).

Thompson highlights the fictional aspect of travel and establishes the genre as a construction. The report based on experience and empirical evidence actually depends on

the subjective perception of a particular individual. Therefore, "a degree of fictionality is thus inherent in all travel accounts" (*Travel* 28) which again complicates the ides of travel as a reliable narrative form. As he talks about 'careful tailoring', travel is all about the process of selection and rejection on the part of the narrator. Thompson writes: "any form of travel text is always a constructed, crafted artifact, which should never be read naively as just transparent window on the world" (30). This shows how travel writing acquires complex features. It questions the reliability of travel in depicting the true picture of the narrated subject. Thompson believes in the traveller's strategies. In postcolonial texts, this fictional aspect is very significant as the narrator adopts different strategies to represent the 'other' in a particular way. The colonial narrator constructs the native as the inferior 'other' and he carefully chooses his stories to prove his writing as an authentic account before his readers. He opts for strategies to present himself as a reliable source of information. Therefore the process of selection and rejection in the construction of the 'other' is very significant as well as problematic.

Thompson explores layers in the reporting of travel. The selective process translates a set of travel experiences into travel text. He teases out some difficulties and dilemma that the travellers carry in their persona. The 'I' stands for both the presence and experience of the traveller; it is an authoritative status on one hand and object of suspicion on the other. The travellers therefore follow what Anthony Pagden calls "principle of attachment" (cited in Thompson), a method to make sense of what they say. Thompson writes: "The traveller must seek to attach unknown entities to known reference points and to familiar frameworks of meaning and understanding" (*Travel* 67). Pagden puts emphasis on the necessity of explaining the travel experience in the familiar ground so as to make sense of what would otherwise be baffling and alien. The travellers do it with the use of common simile but this does not prove to be fruitful always. Their method can be misleading as well.

The Myth of Objectivity

The travellers may sometimes opt for objectivist strategies. To distinguish their accounts from the anecdotal or impressionistic forms, they may adopt non-narrative structures with the help of graphics. Such methods also give one individual's observations and interpretations which can be equated with the mind behind a camera. Travel writing thus

involves subjective thoughts and feelings transformed into objective-looking accounts. Thompson says:

> travel writing has frequently provided a medium in which writers can conduct an autobiographical project, exploring questions of identity and selfhood whilst simultaneously presenting to others a self-authored and as it were authorized account of themselves. (*Travel* 99)

The traveller's subject position gets revealed which makes travel narratives self-reflective at several points. This again involves the strategies and rhetorical techniques of representing the 'self.' The traveller decides what sides of his 'self' will be revealed or will be fashioned. As Thompson observes:

> even travelogues that seem to modern eyes very impersonal and unautobiographical can sometimes serve as a mode of self-fashioning, by which the writer seeks to project to the world a desired identity of a persona. (99)

In other words, travel writing, while exteriorizing the 'other,' also exteriorizes the autobiographical 'self'. His description of the travelled region also becomes an interior voyage. To this extent, the travel writer is like the Conradian narrator, always obsessed with the strangeness of the 'other,' and yet pointing to his own alienation from surroundings at home and abroad.

Thomson explores the imperious nature of the 'self' in travel writing. The image of the 'self' is fashioned in such a way that it can persuade the readers that the account is reliable. The narrator assumes a mastery over the people and places he describes. It reveals a tendency to empower and elevate the narratorial 'self' at the expense of a denigrated 'other.' In the colonial texts this imperious 'I' is apparent in the narrative who aims at establishing the superiority of the collective colonialist 'self' against an inferior 'other.' About the process of othering in travel writing, Thompson writes:

> In a stronger sense, however, it has come to refer more specifically to the processes and strategies by which one culture depicts another culture as not only different but also inferior to itself. (132-33)

In colonial discourse, depiction of the native as inhuman is a rhetorical strategy supported by acts of 'othering' on the ground. As a genre, travel writing portrays the

natives as poor and degraded, in need of help from superior nations. Thus invention of the 'other' is a corollary to intervention in the other's life and territory, culture and civilization.

Gender and Othering in Colonial Travel

The question of gender as a corollary to othering is crucial to the study of colonial travel and its discourse. It not only concerns the representation of the 'other' but also addresses the nature of the 'self' in any narrative. The European imperialist culture was basically a male perception which objectified the colonized nations. Recent studies show that the role of women travellers was a matter of negation. Their writings were not given any importance which denotes the status of the women in the nineteenth century western society. Interestingly, the gender issue is not properly addressed in the postcolonial criticism which raises further questions regarding the subjective position of the critics. However, this issue has been explored by some of the travel theorists while discussing the colonial discourse in travel writing.

While going through the naturalist's world of nineteenth century travel writing texts, Mary Louise Pratt discovers that the traveller's world was without women. Pratt discuses the gendered division of labour around travel and writing. According to her, the "monarch-of-all-I-survey" attitude seen in the travel text itself is the most gendered trope. She observes that "women's access to travel writing seemed even more restricted than their access to travel itself" (*Imperial* 171). However, Pratt suggests that women protagonists tend to produce ironic reversals when they turn up in contact zone. In her 1985 essay, "Scratches on the Face of the Country; Or What Mr. Barrow Saw in the Land of the Bushman", Pratt discusses the different selves of the traveller that get revealed. It is not only the unfamiliar 'other' but the unfamiliar 'self' as well. In the women's case, travel can be a way to discover different selves in the contact zone which were not realized at home.

Sara Mills examines the role of the women travellers in the age of 'high imperialism' in her *Discourse of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing* (1991). She investigates the misconceptions about women's travel writing in the period between nineteenth century and early twentieth century. At the same time, she also highlights the tension created by the women's texts as well as their reception. Mills points to the

general misconception that women's travel writings were rare and that the travellers were not ordinary but exceptional women.

The usual problems while reading a woman traveller's account was that very often they were considered autobiographical where the 'self' is accepted as the author's person; the variety of positions of the 'self' in the text was not a consideration in case of the women's writing. Moreover, women travellers' works were not discussed in relation to their country and their role in the colonialist project. Women were not taken as part of colonialism and they were considered people to be protected instead. Mills states:

> Colonialism is certainly portrayed as a male preserve where females have a very secondary supporting role. Most studies which consider women and imperialism consist of descriptions of 'native' and British women as the objects of male gaze or male protection within colonial text. (*Discourse* 58)

In fact, women's writings were taken as personal. Mills criticizes Edward Said and other critics for not addressing women in their discussion on colonialism. She points out the fact that women travellers were not taken seriously and hence their writings not deemed worth discussing. Mills writes:

> Neither Said nor other analysts include women's writing within their accounts of colonialist writing. There is a tradition of reading women's writing as trivial or as marginal to the mainstream, and this is certainly the attitude to women's travel writing, which is portrayed as the records of travels of eccentric and rather strange spinsters. (61)

Women's texts were seen as different from male colonial travel writing. However, Mills thinks that women's writings are complicated so far as colonialism is concerned. This does not say that they were against colonialism; women travellers definitely show Orientalist features but with a difference. The nineteenth century male colonial writings were marked by openly racist discourses where the natives were reduced to sub-human species which is absent in women's narratives.

Mills discusses the constraints that the women travel writers faced which actually created the differences between their texts and those written by their male counterparts. The social limitations and acceptances were important factors. They could not speak in an open colonial voice as it was "structured by the discourse of femininity" (105). Many of

them were retailored by the publishers as certain types of information were not considered appropriate in women's accounts. Women travel writers found themselves in a double-bind situation as Mills explains:

> If they tend towards the discourses of femininity in their work they are regarded as trivial, and if they draw on the more adventure hero type narratives their work is questioned. (117)

Conventions determined both the narrative and the reception of the same. In order to authenticate their accounts the women travel writers omitted certain portions, specially the adventurous experiences.

Susan Bassnett has critiqued on this discourse of difference in her essay "Travel Writing and Gender." She calls the theory of exceptional women as a classic way of marginalizing women's achievements. Bassnett discusses the subverting role played by women travel writers. According to her, it was a reversal of the social order and a refusal on the women's part to conform to the social norms of the day. She calls them doubly different; first, from other women who conformed to the norms, and from their male counterparts. Bassnett highlights that certain nineteenth century travel accounts even refuted the eroticization of the unfamiliar found in many male texts. There was a tendency to explore a completely different structure that is outside patriarchal control.

Travel offered the women travellers a different life; exploration not only of unknown places but also of their inner selves which were not realized when at home. Bassnett explains:

> Travel for some women, it seems, may have offered a means of redefining themselves, assuming a different persona and becoming someone who did not exist at home. ("Travel" 234)

This refers to the difference between the lives at home and on the road. For many women, travel was a means of realizing different selves. It was an escape from domesticity and to find a way to realize their selves in a changing world.

Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan also talk about the role of travel in a gendered world. According to them, travel could be a means of freedom for the women. Like Bassnett, they too think that it showed the women travellers a way to resist convention

and to have an individual identity. Holland and Huggan go beyond male-female boundary and suggests that travel also could give sexual liberty to people; it could give the scope to the gay travellers to renounce the social bindings on their sexuality and its practice.

Thomson too has similar views in this regard. The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a time when the women required chaperons for travel. Their accounts were intended for private rather than public reading and therefore, the most common forms of women's writings were diaries and letters. Moreover, the accounts were marked as 'feminine' which meant to be devoid of intellectual seriousness and were associated with shallowness and frivolity. Thompson sees the women travellers as contravening the patriarchal ideology, that too, twice: first, as a traveller, denying the separate sphere of the women determined by the society, and then, as an author. However, all the women travellers were not necessarily feminists or proto-feminists. There were women travellers who were careful observers as well as assiduous scholars but there was the risk of their being 'unfeminine.' Thompson observes:

> for a woman travel writer to become too magisterial in her opinions, or too coldly logical, or indeed too strident and impassioned was to risk censure from critics, reviewers and readers for being 'unfeminine.' (*Travel* 184)

This is why there was the belief that women's writings involve a tendency for subjectivism and feelings rather than objectivism and intellect in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

This again brings in the role of reading public and the society in the shaping of the narratives which has been discussed by JanMohamed. Whether it's the male travellers depicting the 'self' and the 'other' or the women travellers writing about their experiences of travel, the reading community plays important role in determining the contents of their narratives. However, although some women worked within the parameter, some others flouted the gendered restrictions placed on them. Thompson explores women travellers who are highly objectivist. Thus, travel became a route to self-empowerment and cultural authority for some women. It provided them an escape from the restrictive social environments. In the postcolonial scene, as Thompson observes, women's travel accounts were more complex as they constituted a counter discourse. They assisted colonialism but at the same time, they took more humanitarian

positions. Thompson believes that in the modern day travel accounts too, the differences between the male and female narratives still exist. The gender issue and social values still play important role. The fear of sexual violence and the sensitivity to the gender issues distinguish the female narratives from those by male travellers.

Travel definitely could serve as a means in reversal of convention in a social sphere where women were expected to have specific roles. It not only explores individual selves but also can unveil different sides of the collective 'self' so far as colonialism is concerned. Women's travel narratives unveil aspects of the colonial discourse that complicate the whole issue of representation of both the 'self' and the 'other.' The discourse of travel is a perpetuation of 'othering,' as much a means to help the colonizer consolidate territory as to express cultural supremacy.

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