

INTRODUCTION

I

There is a rising critical interest within studies of colonialism in exploring the collaboration between Empire-building and projects of exploration and travel. Critics have checked this aspect of colonial expansion by looking at the links between travel, colonialism and the construction of space. Projects under *Critical Geographies* also display an increasing awareness of the extent to which colonialism influenced the construction of space. What is understood to be the northeast of India went through a considerable passage of British colonial occupation.

Almost every travel narrative, especially colonial travel narratives represent visions of formation and transformation of space in explicit or implicit ways. Within travel writing, we get important clues to the rhetoric and material transformation of space. Within colonial travel writing, this is explicit in expedition and exploration narratives, often seen as sub-genres of travel writing, even as there are studies that look at them as independent genres.

The fact that the rise of travel and expedition literature is seen as coterminous with the rise of two other instruments of European colonialism—capitalism and scientific exploration—is an indicator of a paradoxical world that is increasingly textualized and imagined as it insists on precision and hard facts. Travel and expedition narratives seem to prepare the early modern European mind not only to imagine the world but also to see that the world has already been imagined in different terms, in tropes unfamiliar to Europe. There is, in other words, a discrepancy between Europe's knowledge of non-European spaces and the reality of these same spaces as understood by the people who live there. In postcolonial studies, this discrepancy is presented as the difference between real and imagined geographies. The problem is studied, among other things, as one arising out of conflicting points of view while representing what Joanne Sharp so helpfully calls the “imagined other” (*Geographies* 12), at least since Edward Said's famous thesis on Orientalism.

Ironically, the overarching trajectory of Said's Orientalist thesis—which has spawned a whole tradition of symptomatic reading of the Western canon with uneven results—often obscures the fact that the study was based on European travel accounts of the East. In fact, the fact that Said's thesis is used as a generic antidote to colonialism—by analyzing

and interrogating everything ranging from the Bildungsroman to Bin Laden and 9/11—has also diluted some of the issues raised by Said in his comments on travel writing and its obsessive search for a pre-imagined order. Such dilution, whether real or perceived, has also created a long trail of scepticism on the ability of postcolonialism to address historical questions. While one cannot address, and possibly answer, the scepticism surrounding postcolonial studies, it is necessary to look at the work done in this area in recent years by theorists and critics under the rubric of critical geographies.

Apart from showing the importance of the textualized world on offer, these critics avoid the pitfalls of presentism by accepting the limits of the knowledge and the world made ‘knowable’ by geographers and travel writers. Alison Blunt, David Arnold, David Livingstone, Daniel Clayton, James Duncan, Joanne Sharp, Marie Louise Pratt, and Paul Carter—these are the most convenient citations, not necessarily the most representative—return to “the imagined geographies ... inhabited by imagined others” (Sharp 12), and show the relevance of Said’s thesis and method.

Having said that, there is a clear need to adopt cross-disciplinary methods of reading texts that imagine the world of the other. The fact that most of the better statements in this area make use of spatial geography and invariably return to the work of Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja is an important key to the nature of the inquiry itself. This dissertation draws on the production and use of space in colonial India’s North-Eastern Frontier with reference to travel and expedition narratives published between the years 1835 and 1945. Interestingly, this is a case of textual production of space by what David Arnold calls the “technicians” of colonialism (*Colonizing* 8), though the consumption and usage of space is neither restricted by textuality nor limited to “machines” of colonialism (Sharp, *Geographies* 31).

The fact that the northeast—a geographical area of immense cultural, topographical, linguistic and human diversity on India’s eastern border—was created as a consequence of the activities and demands of different colonial apparatuses for over more than a hundred years is in itself a significant determinant of the cartographic epistemology on offer. This dissertation examines the complex webbing of spatial and ideological imperatives refracted through four areas of colonial production and transformation of

space: landscape, ethnoscape, territory, and assets. Each of these is an ideological apparatus as well as part of an evident spatial geography.

Clearly, the shifting nature of the social and economic geography of the region as imagined by colonial travellers over more than a century of engagement disrupted whatever remained of local epistemologies of maps and selves. While this aspect of the life-world is not within the purview of this work, the overall philosophical orientation of any work on the methodological and ideological shifts in understanding the northeast—at least as fashioned by the colonial traveller-explorer—cannot be separated from a consciousness of this life world.

The emergence of the northeast as a spatial entity is founded not only on imagined geographies but also on a whole network of shifting ideologies and tropes. Bengal and the Bengal Frontier—so crucial to the narrative ordering of the border in the texts discussed here—are no longer part of the northeast. Similarly, a major interest of the colonial traveller in the border and frontier regions of the East was to find a stable land route to China for trade and military purposes.

Interestingly, and not unexpectedly, two of the texts deal with the Chinese dimension of colonial travel and expedition narratives. The routes imagined by the colonial traveler did not always work out. Men and materials perished though the dream of extending colonial India's frontier to China's border continued to find expression in real and imagined campaign trails and routes throughout the colonial period. This included (i) Bengal-Assam-Manipur-Moreh-Myanmar; (ii) Assam-Singpho-Khamti-Mishing territory- Aborland (Arunachal Pradesh)-China; (iii) Assam-Nagaland-Manipur-Myanmar-China; (iv) the Stilwell Road extending from Assam to Myanmar and further east to China. The exercise forms the backdrop of the work and informs the overall design of colonial geography of the northeast frontier region. The fact is that even in today's India the rhetoric of governance and governmentality of the northeast is informed to a large measure by the China factor. Whether it is 'Look East' or 'Act East,' the concern is overwhelmingly about China-specific border and trade concerns.

It can be seen that the ideological apparatus of colonial landscaping mutates into a mechanics of making territorial claims and appropriations. At times, the creation of real territories out of imagined empty spaces ensures the mutation of spaces into capital

assets of the Empire. To this extent, this project explores how narratives of travel, especially those of expedition and exploration, in the colonial northeast participate in the visual, territorial and material geographies of the Empire. It examines the construction of space as landscape, territory and colonial capital assets by looking at sixteen exploration and expedition narratives written by colonial officers and agents between the years 1835 and 1945. Imagined and real spaces, therefore, refer not just to cartographic points but also to the possibility of an interactive space created by what David Spurr and Marie Louise Pratt call the ‘rhetoric of Empire’ and the ‘topography of Empire’ respectively. The idea is to show how the Empire builds on rhetoric and transculturation to create material spaces that generate wealth by way of turning natural spaces into assets and by expanding tax bases, among other things.

Objectives:

The objectives of the present study are:

1. To identify and analyze different kinds of space formation in the colonial northeast;
2. To see how space operates as landscape, territory and colonial capital assets in texts of colonial travel; and
3. To see if the idea of space created by the travel writer suggests a transition from landscape to capital asset through visions of territorialization.

Hypothesis

The dissertation begins with the following hypotheses:

- a) That the construction of the northeast is a result of the production and transformation of space;
- b) That the production of space is reflected in colonial travel and expedition narratives;
- c) That the narratives oscillate between rhetoric and objectification;
- d) That the production of space is a quadratic project involving landscape, ethnoscape, territory and assets; and
- e) That narratives of colonial travel and expedition operate as virtual midwives to the project.

II

Review of Literature:

Broadly speaking, the corpus under review can be divided into three main groups. Items in each of the groups have been incorporated into individual chapters, in order that the context of the origin of the ideas that inform the research or the book concerned gets reflected within the research questions generated by the chapters. The study draws on a broad range of materials, a chronological overview of which runs the risk of appearing untidy. Keeping it in mind, the present section seeks to organize the review around a few thematic leads, starting with an outline of the primary materials; texts included in the thesis. The review maps out books and articles, wherefrom the most fundamental theoretical premises and ideas of the thesis come, namely, those directly dealing with space and its production, followed by materials helping the critical theorizing of colonial space construction in general and landscape, territory and tropes in particular. Finally, the review discusses materials that exclusively deal with northeast India: its colonial past, postcolonial present with a focus on the spatial ramifications of British colonialism in its formulation.

Key Issues

The key theoretical premise of the thesis that space is an ideological construct is taken from French thinker Henri Lefebvre's seminal work *The Production of Space* (1974), where he claims that despite its façade of neutrality, space is essentially a political product operating at the behest of capital and political power. Neil Smith's *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space* (1984), explores the cultural and social production of nature within capitalism. Smith contends that capitalism reproduces nature through systematic interventions. David Harvey highlights the centrality of space production within projects of domination in his study *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (1986), where he argues that capitalism transforms spaces into geographies of difference that regularly serve capitalist exploitation. Converted thus into geographies of difference, space helps in the continual re-circulation of surplus capital, the reproduction of the relationships of production (class), and of reproduction (family).

Space and Place

In *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (1989), Edward Soja highlights the need for a critical geography that recognizes the centrality of space in social life. Like Lefebvre, Soja also views space as a construct. He uses the term ‘spatiality’ to refer to the social production of space. *Place/ Culture/ Representation* (1993), edited by James Duncan and David Ley explores the construction of symbolic geographies. The book examines how politics of domination and exclusion operate through ideologically influenced construction of space. Derek Gregory’s *Geographical Imaginations* (1994), focuses on the ways geographical imaginaries appropriate and colonize space. Gregory argues that Eurocentric visual regimes worked to shape the universalistic claims of European science that converted the world into a series of representations or visual codes. *Postmodern Cities and Spaces* (1995), edited by Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson explores the influences of discourses of the postmodern on thinking about spatiality, contemporary cities, and questions of power in urban life. *Critical Geographies: Thinking Space* (2000), by Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift offers helpful perspectives on space and spatial politics. Similarly, Dipankar Gupta’s *Culture, Space and the Nation State* (2000), offers important insights into the distinction between space, place, and site. Gupta highlights the vital role of metaphors in the production of space. In *For Space* (2005), Doreen Massey discusses the mutual imbrications of the spatial and the political. Massey resists the simplistic notion of space as an empty container of objects and views space as relative; a product of connections. Jennifer Brown in her study *Cannibalism in Literature and Film* (2013), shows how colonial travel writings play an important role in generating and furthering a sense of otherness. In *Slavery and the Politics of Place: Representing the Colonial Caribbean, 1770-1833* (2014), Elizabeth A. Bohls highlights the links between the politics of slavery and the politics of place. Insofar as travel writings as an ideological apparatus of the Empire, Robert Clarke’s *Travel Writing from Black Australia: Utopia, Melancholia, and Aboriginality* (2016), explores the employment of aboriginality as a trope for production of landscapes within colonial discourse. Similarly, in *(Re)-viewing Colonial Western Australia through Travellers’ Imaginings, 1850-1914* (2015), Cindy Lane explores the construction of Australia as a colonized space in European travel writings.

Landscape

The thesis draws on an extensive range of material to develop a critical understanding of landscape and its allied concepts. Carl Sauer in *The Morphology of Landscape* (1963), explores the notions of natural and cultural landscape. John Barrell's *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840* (1983), is an interesting study of the way landscapes are used within British painting traditions as a tool to naturalize hegemonic structures. Similarly, Ann Birmingham's *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition 1740—1860* (1984), studies the links between the emergence of rustic landscape painting in eighteenth-century England and the politics of land enclosure. Both these writers highlight the role of ideology in the production of landscapes. In the essay "Prospect, perspective and the evolution of the landscape idea" (1985), Denis Cosgrove explores the historical evolution of landscape, both as a concept and as a practice. Interestingly, Cosgrove views landscape as a way of seeing. His study also traces back the idea of landscape to what is viewed as the linear perspective, a particular aesthetic mode of constructing landscapes in art and architecture. In the book *Landscape and Power* (1994) W. J. T. Mitchell argues that landscape is regularly implicated in projects of power. Mitchell views landscapes as an ideological construct and a political tool. John Wylie's *Landscape* (2007), traces the development of landscape as a concept in space production. Jeff Malpas' *The Place of Landscape: Concepts, Contexts, Studies* (2011), looks at landscape as an instrument to objectify and commodify space.

Insofar as the reception of landscape as an instrument of Empire-building, Paul Carter's *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (1987), highlights the instrumental role played by metaphors in the production landscapes in colonial narratives of travel and expedition. Similarly, Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), argues that colonial travel writing and its allies construct landscape with an aim to dominate and possess. Pratt also explores discursive strategies of landscape production employed by colonial traveler-explorers. Nancy Leys Stephan's *Picturing Tropical Nature* (2001), explores how long-standing ideas about the 'tropics' shape the production of tropical nature in European paintings and photography. Similarly, Andrew Sluyter's *Colonialism and Landscape: Postcolonial Theory and Applications* (2002), situates landscape in the expansive trajectory of European

colonialism. It is important to note that Sluyter highlights the strategic role of landscapes, within colonial projects, as a tool of surveillance. The links between the production of landscapes and the Empire are also explored by Amar Wahab in his study *Colonial Inventions: Landscape, Power, and Representation in Nineteenth-Century Trinidad* (2010). Wahab discusses how colonial discourse reduces spaces in the Caribbean into scenes of savagery and deviance.

The study also draws on works on the production of landscapes in colonial India. Deborah Sutton's *Other Landscapes: Colonialism and the Predicament of Authority in Nineteenth-Century South India* (2011), is an interesting discussion on the transformation of the Nilgiri Hills into a landscape of governance. Sutton also explores the issue in her essay "Redeeming Wood by Destroying the Forest: *Shola*, Plantations, and Colonial Conservancy on the Nilgiris in the 19th Century" (2011).

Territory

The dissertation draws on a range of materials on the production of territory. Stuart Elden's *The Birth of Territory* (1971), deals with the origin and historical development of territory as an idea and practice. In his essay "The Political Organization of Space" (1971), Edward Soja views territoriality as an exercise in the political organization of space. Robert Sack in *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History* (1986), looks at territory as a socially and historically evolving formulation. In his *Geographies of Exclusion* (1995), David Sibley studies how territories operate as micro-geographies of power. Tim Creswell in the book *In Place/ Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression* (1996), studies how the construction of territories regularly draws on narratives of transgression and normative geographies. *Policing Space: Territoriality and the Los Angeles Police Department* (1997), by Steve Herbert, is an interesting discussion on territoriality as an exercise in surveillance. David Delaney in *Territory: a Short Introduction* (2005), looks at territory as a historically and culturally specific political construct. *Borderscapes: Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territory's Edge* (2007), by Prem Kumar Rajaram and Carl Grundy-Warr is an interesting discussion on territorial borders.

Insofar as the production of territories in colonial India, Ian J. Barrow's *Making History, Drawing Territory: British Mapping of India, c 1756-1905* (2003), explores the

cartographic construction of India as a territory. In *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India 1765—1843* (1997), Matthew H. Edney views cartography as a key tool of territory production in colonial India. Interestingly, both these writers highlight the role of colonial cartography as an ideological exercise.

Colonial Space Production

Insofar as the production of colonial space, Anthony King's book *Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social Power and Environment* (1976), explores the links between the production of urban spaces by the Empire and the rhetoric of difference. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), it goes without saying, offers important insights into the politics of space and the Empire. In a similar vein, in *Colonizing Egypt* (1988), Timothy Mitchell explores the spatial transformation of Egypt brought about by the Empire. David Spurr's *The Rhetoric of Empire* (1993), contends that the colony in narratives of travel is often a rhetorical construct. Interestingly, Spurr identifies a cluster of tropes that act as tool of space production in colonial discourse. Nicholas Thomas's *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel, and Government* (1994), unpacks the links between colonial travel and colonial ethnography. Similarly, Casey Blanton's *Travel Writing: the Self and the World* (2002), and Peter Hulme's *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (2002), explore the links between travel and imperialism. Tim Youngs, in *Travel Writing in the Nineteenth Century: Filling the Blank Spaces* (2006), argues that as an important cultural imaginary travel writing facilitates expansionist projects. Pramod K. Nayar in *Colonial Voices: the Discourses of Empire* (2012), explores the tropes employed in colonial discourse.

Insofar as the construction of India as a colonial space, Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha's *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India* (1993), is a helpful point of departure. It views colonialism as an 'ecological encounter' between two social and cultural spaces and highlights the disruptions created by colonial interventions in the ecological space of India. In *Ideologies of the Raj* (1995), Thomas R Metcalf argues that the British Empire in India operated through an ideology of difference. Metcalf's is an important thesis to investigate the politics of space production in colonial India. Bernard Cohn's study *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: the British in India* (1997), explores forms of colonial knowledge in India. His thesis that colonial knowledge is best viewed as an attempt to transform spaces in colonial India into a grid

of investigative modalities is an important perspective to explore colonial space production. Mark Harrison explores the links between colonial discourses on health, climate and ideologies of racism in *Climates and Constitutions: Health, Race, Environment and British Imperialism in India 1600-1850* (1999). In *Environmental Encounters in South Asia* (2001), Deepak Kumar explores the role played by imperial environmental imaginations in transforming Asia into a geography of surveillance. In *Environment and Empire* (2007), Lotte Hughes and William Beinart study the conversion of pre-colonial spaces into colonial 'resource frontiers'. Ravi Ahuja's *Pathways of Empire* (2009), examines how colonial roads transformed pre-colonial geographies into imperial assets. Similarly, James Hevia in *The Imperial Security State: British Colonial Knowledge and Empire-building in Asia* (2012), studies the link between colonial surveys and the production of strategic geographies.

Historical Contexts and the Making of the Northeast

This dissertation also draws on a range of studies to develop the historical and spatial context of the study. H. K. Barpujari's books *Problem of the Hill Tribes: North-East Frontier 1843-72* (1976), and *Assam in the Days of the Company 1826-1858* (1980), offer useful insights into the history of British colonialism in the northeast. N. N. Acharyya in the book *North East as Viewed by Foreigners* (1985), explores how the northeast figures in the writings of foreign travelers into the region. Meena Sharma Barkataki's book *British Administration in North-East India 1826-1874* (1985), is a historical exploration of the arrival and consolidation of the Empire in the northeast. The book *Reorganization of North-East of India since 1947* (1994), by B. Datta Ray and S P Agarwal, explores colonial and postcolonial trajectories of (re) territorializations in the northeast of India. In more recent times, Sanjib Baruah in his book *India against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationalism* (1999), explores the possibility of alternative imaginations of the space of the region in new ways. In *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India* (2005), Baruah traces the incorporation of the northeastern region in the global capitalist economy to the spatial politics of the Empire. The view that the metamorphosis of Assam into a resource frontier of a rapidly expanding British Empire could be traced back to colonial spatial imagining and is also supported by Arupjyoti Saikia in his book *Jungles, Reserves, Wildlife: A History of Forests in Assam* (2005). Similarly, Subir Bhaumik in his book *Troubled Periphery:*

Crisis of India's North East explores the spatial interventions made by the Empire in the northeastern region. In *The Frontier Cultures: A Social History of Assamese Literature* (2012), Manjeet Baruah probes into trajectories of shared spatial and cultural imaginaries which characterized pre-colonial spaces in the northeast.

III

The Corpus

The sixteen texts chosen for analysis are: Francis Jenkins' *Report on the North-East Frontier of India* (1835), Robert Boileau Pemberton's *The Eastern Frontier of India* (1835), John M'Cosh's *Topography of Assam* (1837), William Griffith's *Journals of Travels in Assam, Burma, Bootan, Affghanistan and the Neighbouring Countries* (1847), Maj. John Butler's *Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam During a Residence of Fourteen Years* (1855), Edward Tuite Delton's *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872), R.G. Woodthorpe's *The Lushai Expedition 1871-1872* (1873), T. T. Cooper's *The Mishmee Hills: An Account of a Journey Made in an Attempt to Penetrate Tibet from Assam to Open New Routes for Commerce* (1873), John F. Michell's *The North-East Frontier of India* (1883), Adam Scott Reid's *Chin-Lushai Land* (1893), James Johnstone's *Manipur and the Naga Hills* (1896), L. A. Waddell's *The Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley* (1901), Angus Hamilton's *In Abor Jungles of North-East India* (1912), Frederick Marshman Bailey's *China-Tibet-Assam* (1945), and two unpublished tour diaries of Captain John Butler, the officiating Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills, for the year 1870, and W J William, the officiating Inspector General of Police (1878). It may be mentioned here that Bailey's expedition took place in 1911 but the text was published in 1945. In a way, colonial expeditions within the northeast come to a closure around this period, hence, the marking off of the selected corpus between 1835 and 1945. It may further be mentioned that World War II changed the expedition landscape in the region. So, the choice of 1945 as the terminal year for the selected corpus is logical.

The texts have been chosen keeping in mind three different factors. First, these texts are written by officers or military personnel directly working with colonialism. The fact that their writings emerge as records of exploration, expeditions, surveillance projects, and military campaigns puts this class of texts as a category that is different from those under

the rubric of leisure-travel. Further, a couple of texts are from ethnographic accounts of officers directly in charge of some colonial project or the other. Significantly, two of the texts are tour-diaries of colonial officers whose records point to significant changes in the mind and method of the Empire. These two texts have been collected from the Assam State Archives. The third important factor behind the choice of the texts relates to their historical contexts. Most of what these writers have said and done is historically verifiable, and therefore situates colonial travel writing in a unique position between lived and imagined histories. The corpus, therefore, offers an alternative trajectory of Space and travel writing studies. Space Studies contributes to a closer understanding of the complicity between travel writing and Empire-building.

IV

Methodology

The primary method applied here is to combine tools of postcolonial and critical geographical readings with closer textual analysis. It is informed by ideological critical practices as it involves examination of issues like construction of space and occupation and transformation of territory.

The Structure of the Thesis

The essay is threaded through six core chapters, apart from the Introduction and Conclusion.

Chapter 1, titled “Contextualizing Space and Critical Geography,” places the study in a theoretical context by introducing and developing the concepts of space and the production of colonial space. It is divided into four sections. Section I deals with the idea of space. It gives an outline of the ways in which space has been understood over time with special focus on its recent reception as a construct rather than as a free-standing entity. It primarily draws on the works of Henri Lefebvre (1974), Neil Smith (1984), David Harvey (1996), and Edward Soja (1989), to argue that space is a political construct. This section also links the idea of space-production with the colonial project and highlights the transformation of natural space into military or economic utilities. It finally draws upon critical ideas from scholars like Timothy Mitchell (1991), Bernard S. Cohn (1997), Thomas Metcalf (1995), etc. Section II explores the concept of colonial

space. Towards that end, it brings together perspectives, observations, and arguments which do not always demonstrate an explicit connection with the construction of colonial space per se, but which offer substantial help in investigating colonial space formation. The chapter also sets the northeast in historical and geographical contexts that inform the postcolonial debates on the region. Section III deals with the issue of ‘production’ of northeast India in terms of ‘real’ and ‘imagined’ territories and traces out a brief chronological outline of the origin and expansion of British colonialism in the region as well as projects of territorialization. Section IV discusses the key metaphors or tropes that went into the transformation of the historical northeast to the colonial northeast.

Chapter 2, titled “Understanding Colonial Space: From Enunciation to Assets,” develops the theoretical framework of the study by further explicating the concepts of landscape and territory. The linking of enunciation and assets owes substantially to Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), where he shows how colonial and imperial rhetoric morphs into geopolitical and economic interventions. Drawing upon insights from W. J. T. Mitchell (1994), John Wylie (2007), Denis Cosgrove (2012), the chapter develops an understanding of landscape as an ideological instrument of possession or acquisition of space. With insights drawn from Mary Louise Pratt (1992), and Tim Youngs (2006), the chapter argues that landscape is one of the vital instruments of colonial space production. Similarly, the concept of territory is explored in light of the perspectives developed by Edward Soja (1971), Robert Sack (1986), David Delaney (2005), Tim Cresswell (1996), and Ian J. Barrow (2003).

Chapter 3, titled “Landscape: Symbolic Geography and the Politics of Coding,” explores how the colonial northeast is turned into a landscape in narratives of colonial travelers and military agents like Major John Butler (1855), Robert Gosset Woodthorpe (1873), James Johnstone (1896), and William Griffith (1847). Drawing upon the rhetorical strategies of landscape production used in colonial travel narratives—especially Mary Louise Pratt’s idea of ‘negative aesthetic,’ and ‘density of meaning’—the chapter examines how colonial texts of expedition and exploration transform the northeast frontier into a rhetoric of unease. It also argues that the ‘negative aestheticisation’ going into the framing of landscapes along a set of dystopian images in these texts, generates spaces for potential colonial intervention.

Chapter 4, titled “Ethnoscape: The Body between Symbolic Geography and Colonial Allegory,” examines how the body emerges as a decisive spatial trope in colonial travel and expedition literature, especially in ethnographic texts. It explores how the body of the native inhabitant in ethnocentric landscapes—either constructed or realized—is often represented in ways that defy human description and yet help develop a symbolic geography of otherness. It examines the framing of such body-spaces or ethnospaces—symbolic and yet instrumental in spatial politics—in the northeast frontier region with reference to Edward Tuite Delton’s *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872), and L. A. Waddell’s *The Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley* (1901).

Chapter 5, titled “Territory: Acquisition, Appropriation, and the Politics of Space,” explores the construction of the northeast as a territory in narratives by Francis Jenkins (1835), Robert Boileau Pemberton (1835), John M’Cosh (1837), and T. T. Cooper (1873). The chapter contends that the transformation of space into territory always begins with a powerfully enforced rhetoric of occupation and maintenance. However, in the texts under investigation, the politics of territorializing operates primarily through a rhetoric of transgression and containment. It also explores how designs of territorialization are pursued through a rhetoric of appropriation disguised as a rhetoric of appropriateness, a rhetoric of transgression disguised as a rhetoric of security and a rhetoric of Empire disguised as a rhetoric of utility.

Chapter 6, titled “Assets: From Symbolic Geography to Productive Space,” explores how colonial travel is implicated in the transformation of spaces under possession into capital assets by examining the narratives of Adam Scott Reid (1893), Angus Hamilton (1912), John F. Michell (1883), Frederick Marshman Bailey (1945), and the tour diaries of Captain John Butler, the Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills (1871), and W. J. William, the officiating Inspector General of Police (1878). The chapter argues that the construction of colonial space operates in a sequence from inception to subsequent consolidation, only to be followed by attempts at material transformation into visible spaces and assets. This chapter shows how the rhetoric of Empire mutates into the materiality of Empire, focusing particularly on the conversion of colonial territories into colonial assets. This chapter concludes by showing how the overarching logic of colonial cartography lays the foundation of what we call the northeast today.

The dissertation shows that the production of space is a paradoxical activity. We imbue places with meaning in the same way that we deny spaces their meaning. Clearly, place-making is a process of transforming space (a no-place), into place. It means giving space a kind of meaning that it did not have or the kind of meaning one group of people may think the place did not have. In reality, the transformation can be signficatory and figurative, on the one hand, and substantive or factual, on the other. If it is signficatory, it turns space into a trope, a signifying practice. Again, there are place-makers who want a substantive and material transformation of space. The first group in a way invents the knowable, the second makes it. Poets and artists invent and visualize space. Architects are not just happy with inventing space. They make and objectify space. The northeast of India, as we see it today, was partly made, and objectified, by colonial officers and agents. Significantly, it was also partly made by travel writing, especially exploration and expedition narratives. The tropes invoked by the writers discussed here created a topos that would carry some of the contradictions—that includes a great network of colonial desire and design—available in these texts.

An issue that needs to be addressed here is the absence of female expedition texts in the chosen corpus. Interestingly, while female travellers like P. H. Moore, and Elizabeth Vickland comment extensively on different aspects of social, cultural, religious practices, healthcare, knowledge-systems including indigenous medicinal practices, we do not see any independent female explorer in the region who also undertook expeditions of the kind discussed throughout. Clearly, this thesis does not address the larger issue of gender and the Empire and the role played by women travel writers in furthering the interest of colonialism. One may note interesting books and essays that examine trajectories of Empire and travel (see Begum, Ghose, Mohanty). What needs to be emphasized is the long shadow of colonialism on map-making as a colonial apparatus and as a political narrative that fosters, facilitates, and justifies the production of wealth through territory marking and territory transformation.