WHAT IS IN A NAME?
POLITICS OF SPATIAL IMAGINATION IN COLONIAL ASSAM

CENISEAS PAPERS
Number 5

BODHISATTVA KAR

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Centre for Northeast India, South and Southeast Asia Studies.
Guwahati, Assam, India

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Published by

Centre for Northeast India, South and Southeast Asia Studies
Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development
39, Sapta Swahid Path
Dispur, Guwahati - 781 006
Assam, India

Price : Rupees Thirty Only

Printed at:
Everywhere
Dispur, Guwahati - 781 006
Assam, India.

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Series Editor's Note

The CENISEAS papers seek to promote the intellectual mission of the Centre for Northeast India, South and Southeast Asia Studies [CENISEAS] (briefly described on the back cover of this publication). Our focus is on understanding Northeast India in the context of its transnational neighbourhood. We are interested in exploring policy options that would make the transnational subregional projects involving Northeast India work to the advantage of its peoples.

International borders surround Northeast India on almost all four sides (except for the narrow Siliguri corridor on the west). While we are used to thinking of the region as the north-eastern borderlands of South Asia, it can also be thought of as the northwestern borderlands of Southeast Asia. Thus the transnational subregional projects involving India, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh are as relevant to Northeast India as those that promote cooperation between countries in South Asia and those across India's eastern and northern borders. The "politics of spatial imagination" therefore is of more than cursory interest to CENISEAS.

We were therefore pleased to invite Bodhisattva Kar, a doctoral student in History at Jawaharlal Nehru University in

New Delhi, to speak at the Centre on this theme in the context of Assam in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This publication — the fifth in the CENISEAS Papers series — grew out of the seminar held on February 25th 2004.

In this paper Kar takes up an episode in the intellectual history of Assam when places of *purāṇic* geography such as Kāmarūpa and Prāgjyotiṣapura began to be identified with modern Assam. Establishing a correspondence between places referred to in ancient texts, and places located within what was then the expanding space of British colonial India, was more than a matter of using scientific methods to determine geographical truths. It was a project with profound political implications; in Kar's words, a contested project that involved "immense ideological labor." After all, establishing a correspondence between the cultural geography of ancient India and the space of British India could make the latter seem natural. The claims, often the product of methods that included the "flexible and liberal use of etymological principles," involved giant leaps of faith.

One aspect of this episode in intellectual history becomes particularly interesting in light of the contests over history in today's Assam. Late nineteenth and early twentieth century Assamese intellectuals, according to Kar, were keen on getting for Assam a "respectable" place in the map of Indian tradition. They were anxious to prove that this frontier province was not just "a belated appendix to the 'great Indian tradition.'" Thus on the strength of local traditions, Anundram Borooah argued that modern Guwahati was the site of ancient Prāgjyotiṣa or Prāgjyotiṣapura, and that the colonial district of Kamrup of which Guwahati was the capital was ancient Kāmarūpa and that this is where the Mahabharata's battle between Kṛṣṇa and Naraka took place. Later in the 20th century A. C. Agarwala, argued that the Aryans compiled the Vedas and the Upanishads when they lived in Assam and Kanaklal Barua stretched the boundaries of Kāmarūpa to include not only neighbouring ar-

eas, but also some far-away places in the Indian heartland. "A larger share in the British Indian space," writes Kar, "was an immediate assurance of a more decent place in 'the great Indian tradition'".

The labours of Assamese intellectuals of that period are a far cry from the politics of history in contemporary Assam. In recent years a number of pro-independence Assamese intellectuals, in Udayon Misra's words, have 're-read, re-interpret(ed) and even re-create(d) history' in order to make the case that Assam had always been independent of India.[1] Indeed this battle over history — over the question of Assam's historical ties with India — has been more than a matter of academic debate. It has been embroiled in a bloody struggle between 'insurgents' and the architects of 'counter-insurgency operations.' Thus history, for Assam's former Governor Lt. Gen S.K. Sinha, became a 'psychologial weapon' to fight militancy. Since 'they' (i.e. pro-independence Assamese intellectuals) speak in terms of Assam never being a part of India, he took it upon himself to 'prove how wrong they were.'[2]

Many readers will be disappointed that Kar does not address the question of the truth or falsity of claims. His focus is on the process by which "truths" are produced. But where does it leave us in terms of today's politically charged battles over history? It seems to me that to construct and sustain a modern political community it is neither necessary nor desirable to appeal to ancient history. It is best to take political community as a contingent historical possibility rather than assert continuity

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[1] Udayon Misra, *The Periphery Strikes Back: Challenges to the Nation-State in Assam and Nagaland*, (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2000), p. 62.

[2] S.K. Sinha, "Violence and Hope in India's Northeast," in *Faultlines* (K.P.S. Gill and Ajai Sahni eds.), Vol. 10 (January) (New Delhi: Bulwark Books and the Institute of Conflict Management, 2002), p. 19.

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with some pre-political primordial given. The "we" in the constitutional preamble of "we the people," is best seen as a performative act. It is collective action that brings this "we" into being. The constitutional moment is an act of foundation and founding a new polity through a constitution "exemplifies the human potentiality to do the unprecedented".[3] In the context of today's Assam recognizing that there is no inevitability of community can generate the will to make a new beginning and the road to it lies in a politics of reconciliation.

The Centre for Northeast India, South and Southeast Asia Studies and the CENISEAS paper series have been made possible by a grant from the Ford Foundation.

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[3] Andrew Schaap, "The Time of Reconciliation and the Space of Politics," Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics, University of Melbourne and Australian National University, Canberra, Working Paper 2003/8, pp. 8-9.

What is in a Name?
Politics of Spatial Imagination in Colonial Assam

[Such is] the unconquerable power in the names ... a power which persists in the face of all topographic displacements.

– Walter Benjamin, The Arcades Project

Identifications of the experienced spaces of the colony with the scripted territories of ancient traditions formed a major genre of much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Indological writings. Initially understood as an innocent founding procedure of recuperating the forgotten histories of 'India' and its regions, the intriguing question has continued to excite the imagination of the local intelligentsias across South Asia till date.[1] This paper is concerned with exploring such toponymic practices in and through which the truth of 'Assamese' history was produced and codified as a territorial attachment in the variegated orientalist discourse. Through a discussion of the

[1] B. D. Chattopadhyaya, *A Survey of Historical Geography of Ancient India* (Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research) lists a few hundred entries on the subject between 1947 and 1972. In his introduction, Chattopadhyaya not only observes a great deal of "methodological continuity" between colonial and so-called postcolonial writings in this genre but also notes how "[w]ith rare exceptions, 'regions' in studies on historical geography correspond to present Indian states." Particularly for Assam, see Ichhimuddin Sarkar, *Aspects of Historical Geography of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa (Ancient Assam)* (Calcutta: Naya Prakash, 1992) and Sarat Kr. Phukan, *Toponymy of Assam* (New Delhi, Omsons, 2001).

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methods and objectives of these identificatory practices, this paper not only wishes to register how the tension between the centre and the margins of a colonized 'nation' was constituted, exercised and sustained along territorial axes, but also attempts to reopen some issues about the texture of historical knowledge in the colonies.

Plotting Places

In the beginning, two things, at least, need to be stated about the colonial will to absolute recognizability of ancient place-names. First, toponymic identification was something more than a sweet Indological pastime. Preparing an onomastic inventory from the 'classical' Sanskrit texts was rationalized in the name of retrieving the true tradition of 'India' by disentangling the historical from the mythical. Names of persons and places functioned as stable signposts in an otherwise opaque and slippery network of shared narratives. Their recurrence was understood as corroboration, as a mark of their historicity, and the stories in the context of which they were recognized were imagined as having been rendered interpretable within the language of history. Particularly the names of places occurring within the said texts ensured the idea of fixity and continuity without which a culture seemed unmappable. To stage a beginning, the historical discipline needed a theater of immobility, an indisputable site or foundation of space upon which the temporal plots could be unfolded[2]. The currency of the "physicalist view" of space – "imbu[ing] all things spatial with a lingering sense of primordiality and physical composition, an aura of

[2] "[Naming] practices created a network of places within which events could unfold its time, in which history could begin to take place once it had *taken* places", Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 172.

objectivity, inevitability, and reification"[3] – within the nineteenth century historical profession has been discussed in greater details and with much more subtlety by several essayists.[4] Suffice it to say here that almost a calculated erasure of the role of physical and ideological labor in producing spaces densely informed the search for local and imperial/national traditions. Reinscribing the extant localities on Indology's onomastic register justified British India's claim to – as the 1828 East India Gazetteer put it – "the Brahminical geography."[5] In this sense, I shall argue, toponymic identification was a major site of ideological investment that worked to naturalize the space of British India. The reinscription of a place into a precolonial textual tradition not only provided a sense of security to the colonial officials who were thus armed to negotiate with the very fact of coloniality in their governance in reference to the ancient tradition of the locale[6], but also seemed agreeable to the middle-

[3] Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 79.

[4] Paul Carter, one of the pioneers in the field, defines "spatial history" as an active move against the mistaken teleology of "imperial history" which has it as its unexamined assumption that lands simply exist on the surface of the globe awaiting their colonizers, that they provide a stage on which history unfolds. "Imperial space... with its ideal, neutral observer and its unified, placeless Euclidean passivity, was a means of foundation, a metaphorical way of transforming the present into a future enclosure, a visible stage, an orderly cause-and-effect pageant." Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (London: Faber, 1987), p. 304. See also Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994); David N. Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

[5] Walter Hamilton, *East India Gazetteer*, vol. 1 (1828; Delhi: Low Price Publication, 1993), p. 68.

[6] See Lt. James Matthie's *Report on the District of Darrang* (1835) for this. Directorate of Historical and Antiquarian Studies Transcript No. 245, Transcript Volume No. 60. See specifically pp. 7, 10, 15, 22-23.

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class ‘regional’ intellectuals for having been allotted a *place* in ‘the great Indian tradition’.

Second, the process was unmistakably, but unequally, dialogic. Gleaning names from the Sanskrit texts, which were understood as reservoir of the authentic tradition, required considerable assistance from the pundits, particularly in the matters of exegeses and translations of the verses.[7] By the end of the nineteenth century, a number of Sanskrit-knowing Indian scholars had already taken up the issue with great vigor, and within the appropriative bonds of nationalist histories toponymic identification flourished with a remarkable ease. The community that occupied the Indological space in late colonial India was not racially exclusive, and transmission of ideas and information across the cultural boundaries was certainly encouraged. But this does not lead us to believe that the scholarly space was exempted from the effects of coloniality. The genre itself was framed within the cultural demand of colonialism upon the native to produce an unbroken and authentic ‘historical tradition’. The assumptions that steered the Indological hunt through the dense mélange of indigenous narratives were derivative of a profoundly historicist culture that prided itself on its supposed epistemic superiority. Scriptures were opened up to the arrogance of history, believing that thanks to its scientific methods nothing could remain hidden from its pervasive gaze.

[7] On the dynamics and politics of textualized tradition in colonial India, see Lata Mani, ‘Contentious Traditions: The Debate on *Sati* in Colonial India’, in Kumkum Sanghari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989), pp. 88- 121, Nicholas B. B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich Von Stietencron (eds.), *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995).

The intensity of this demand may be estimated from the White Islands story of Francis Wilford, a late eighteenth century Indologist who earned both criticism and praise from the contemporary and subsequent colleagues in the field by penning a fiercely provocative essay on the geography of Egypt and the origin of the Nile on the basis of ‘the Ancient Books of the Hindoos’.[8] A great enthusiast in toponymic identification, Wilford decided to write a series of essays on the ancient geographical knowledge of the Hindus and employed a Brahmin pundit to spot and collate relevant sources from the purāṇas. His enthusiasm greatly increased when the pundit told him after some days that mentions have been found in ancient scriptures of a certain Śvetadvīpa (‘White Islands’) whose description perfectly tallies with that of the British Isles. Wilford received a translation of the relevant passages and began to write about this great discovery that would show how the colonial connection between the two countries had already been prefigured in the ancient native texts. In the course of writing, however, he chose to look at the original script and was shocked to learn that the pundit in his over-enthusiasm to help the employer had erased the ‘original’ words and inserted the name of Śvetadvīpa instead.[9]

This incident was trumpeted in the contemporary academic circuit not only as a glaring case of the usual fraudulent nature of the pundits, but also as signifying the risk of – what a

[8] Francis Wilford, ‘On Egypt and other countries adjacent to the Cālī River, or Nile of Ethiopia, from the Ancient books of the Hindus’, *Asiatick Researches*, III (1792), pp. 295-468.

[9] See, Francis Wilford, ‘An essay on the Sacred Isles in the West, with other essays connected with that work. (With Pl.)’, *Asiatick Researches*, VII (1805), pp. 245-367; IX (1807), pp. 32-243; X (1808), pp. 27-157; XI (1810), pp. 11-152. This incident has been discussed in some details in Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Vistaar: New Delhi, 1997), pp. 91-93.

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major figure in the field, Vivien de Saint-Martin, was to declare – becoming victim to the "imposture geographical literature of the Hindus."[10] Over the course of the nineteenth century, the Indologists assigned themselves the task of stabilizing the norms and rules of identification, regularizing its procedures of differentiating between the true and the false, the relevant and the extraneous, and most importantly, the original and the interpolated.[11] It has been examined in related studies how firmly the model of one Ür-text and its various deviations gripped the Indological imaginings.[12] Derivative of this was the conceptualization of 'interpolations': sections of texts were marked as having been 'inserted' later and therefore were understood as untrue or less authentic. The operational consensus among the Indologists was that there existed ascertainable historical deposit beneath the surface of myths awaiting their decoders, the historians. This conviction was possibly inspired by a simpler positivist faith in the power of increasing accumulation of data in evening out all inconsistencies.

The search for the authentic tradition was of course not restricted to textual studies alone. Alexander Cunningham, who is often credited with the first systematic study of ancient toponyms in colonial India,[13] chillingly declared in 1848 that a

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[10] Quoted in Surendranath Majumdar, 'Contributions to the Study of the Ancient Geography of India', *Indian Antiquary*, L (1920), p. 119.

[11] Cf. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language* [1969], trans., A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982).

[12] See Paula Richman (ed.), *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of A Narrative Tradition in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991) and Paula Richman (ed.), *Questioning Rāmāyaṇas: A South Asian Tradition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[13] Bimla Churn Law, *Historical Geography of Ancient India* (Paris: Societe Asiatique de Paris, 1954), p. 53.

study of architecture, sculpture, coins and inscriptions "would throw more light on the ancient history of India, both public and domestic, than the printing of all the rubbish contained in the 18 puranas."[14] But although Cunningham's *Memorandum of 1862* proposing a thorough "investigation of the archaeological remains of Upper India" described the former as "the only reliable sources of information as to the early condition of the country",[15] in the capacity of the first Director of the Archaeological Survey he was soon to discover that without leads from the ancient narratives the disciplinary standards of coherence, correspondence and corroboration could not be established on the basis of "ancient monuments" alone. Stanislas Julien's translation (1853) of the manuscripts ascribed to the seventh-century Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang (*Voyages du pelerin Hiouen-tsang*) encouraged Cunningham to undertake his well-known archaeological tour across the Gangetic Valley in the eighteen sixties. The course of this tour claimed to repeat Tsang's itinerary and establish the identities of the various landscapes presumably visited by the Chinese monk twelve hundred years ago[16]. The thrust of Julien's translation, carried out within a stabler tradition of textual Indology, was to render the "Sanskrit originals" of the Chinese nomenclatures. The amount of gravity that Julien attached to this task may be gauged from the fact that before printing the full translation he published a series of – what he titled – 'Documents Géographique', where the issue of

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[14] Quoted in Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *A History of Indian Archaeology: From the Beginning to 1947* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1988), p. 52.

[15] Alexander Cunningham, 'Introduction', *Archaeological Survey of India: Report for the Year 1871-2* (1872; Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1972), iii.

[16] See Wm. Anderson, 'Attempt to identify some of the Places mentioned in the Itinerary of Hiuan Thsang, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, (XVI), p. 1183 (the enunciation of a singularly perverse theory); and Alexander Cunningham, 'Verification of the Itinerary of Hwan Thsang, &c', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, (XVII), p. 476.

toponymic identification was intensively dealt with.[17] Cunningham fervently depended on this identification, but he also drew heavily on the works of Vivien de Saint-Martin saying that "[h]is identifications have been made with so much care and success that few places have escaped his research, and most of these have escaped only because the imperfection or want of fullness in our maps rendered actual identification quite impossible."[18] Nadia Abu El-Haj has recently shown in the context of Palestine how fundamental this politics of naming was to the gathering of material-symbolic facts through excavatory archaeology and how the Biblical renaming of the terrain functioned to render the Jewish connection to the land visible – a connection that predates 19th-century Zionist colonization of Palestine.[19] In British India of the 1860s excavations did not begin and the textual thrust of archaeology was much more prominent.

Thus the procedure, based on Julien's controversial *Methode pour dechijfrer et transcrire les noms sanserifs qui se rencontrent dans les limes chinois* (1861)[20], was somewhat like this: the words "I-lan-na-po-fa-to" would be read in the manuscript, "Hiraṇya Parvata" would be identified as the original, and Cunningham would locate it in the Mongher Hills after calculating the distance from the previous station; Chen-po in the manuscript, Ćampā in translators' renditions, Bhagalpur on

[17] T. W. Rhys Davids, 'Introduction', Thomas Watters, *On Yüan Chwāng's Travels in India, 629-645 AD*, eds. T. W. Rhys Davids and S. W. Bushell (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1904).

[18] Quoted in Abu Imam, *Sir Alexander Cunningham and the Beginnings of Indian Archaeology* (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1966), p. 53n.

[19] Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), Ch. 4

[20] One may be referred to Julien's bitter controversy with Joseph Toussaint Reinaud here.

the British Indian map; Kie-chu-hoh-khi-lo – Kājūghira – Kajinghar and so on.[21] Etymology was not displaced by archaeology as the organon of toponymic discourse; it was only given a new lease of life. It does not come as a surprise, then, that in his first *Four Reports* Cunningham gratefully cherished the deep continuity between the amateur Indologists and the professional field-archaeologists, comparing the former with the giants and the latter with the pigmies.[22] In the 1872 *Memorandum of Instructions* Cunningham explained to his assistants that among the six points that the Archaeological Reports "should ... always include", the very first is "[t]he various names of the place reported upon, and their origin or derivation".[23] Collection of local traditions, reading 'ancient texts' and learning from the contemporary toponymic discourse remained equally important, if not given a new stamp of authority by the scientistic idiom of field archaeology. "Kia-mo-lu-po" was promptly ascertained as Kāmarūpa and in turn as Kamrup, a district in Assam Proper and its king "P'o-se-kie-lo-fa-mo" as Bhāskaravarmaṇa, although neither the Government nor the Director of the Archaeological Survey himself had been interested in proposing a full-fledged survey in the newly constituted Chief Commissionership. The authentic tradition of India – almost everyone traversing the early and mid-nineteenth century Indological space presumed – could be recognizably and justifiably reconstructed without this frontier zone inhabited mostly

[21] Samuel Beal, *Si-yu-ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World, translated from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsang (AD 629)* (London: Trubner & Co., 1884), Book X.

[22] Alexander Cunningham, 'Introduction', *Archaeological Survey of India: Four Reports made during the Years 1862-63-64-65* (1872; Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1972), p.v.

[23] Alexander Cunningham, 'Introduction', *Archaeological Survey of India: Report for the Year 1871-72* (1872; Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1972), p.v.

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by 'head-hunting tribes' and 'opium-eating' Assamese. Horace Wilson's *Ariana Antiqua* and 'Analysis of the Purāṇas' – the most influential texts on Indian toponymy in the early half of the century – were premised on this idea.

Even when the "archaeological evidences" began to arrive they were not of much help in themselves, because decipherment was possible only within a certain ideological context. John Fleet acutely recognized this problem when he published in 1887 the third volume of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, a series initiated by Cunningham, with translations and annotations. The 22nd line in the 'Allahabad Posthumous Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta' mentioned the rulers of "Samataṭa, Davāka, Kāmarūpa, Nepāla, Karttṛpura" as "pratyantanṛpatiḥ". Fleet clarified,

> This may denote either the kings within the frontiers of Samataṭa and the following countries, i.e., the 'neighbouring kings' of those countries, or the kings or chieftains just outside the frontiers of them. Upon the interpretation that is accepted, will depend the question whether Samudragupta's empire included those countries, or whether it only extended up to, and was bounded by, their frontiers.[24]

Rather than conclusively closing the issue, inscriptions and coins continued to reenergize the debate on Assam's location in the

[24] John Faithful Fleet, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. 3: Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors (1887; Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1970), p. 14n.

map of the Indian tradition.[25] We shall have more occasions to refer to this question later. Here we pause to observe that in Assam, where the government did not extend the archaeological surveys till the end of the century, the project of recovering the ancient history of the region was passionately reliant on an array of "classical" Sanskrit texts at least well into the beginning of the twentieth century.[26] The problem that the early colonial Indologists had encountered in smoothing down the diversely-weaved Sanskrit narratives did not disappear even by the end of the nineteenth century.

As an exit from this disorderly pool of facts and fictions, myths and histories, Frederick Eden Pargiter, one of the most influential figures in early twentieth century toponymic discourse, saw two distinct and competing "traditions" narrating the Indian past: the "Kṣatriya" epic-purāṇic tradition and the

[25] See especially the note by H. Torrens in F. Jenkins, 'Paper on ancient Indian land grants of copper, discovered in Assam, with literal translation by Saroda Prosad Chuckerbuty and notes by Pandit Kamala Kanta and H. Torrens' (1 Pl.), *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, IX (1840), pp. 766-782 for the perplexities regarding place names generated by copper inscriptions. See also A. F. Rudolf Hoernle, 'The Gauhātī Copper-Plate Grant of Indrapāla of Prāgjōtisa in Āsām' (3 Pl.), *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, LXVI (1) (1897), pp. 113-132 and A. F. Rudolf Hoernle, 'The Nowgong Copper-Plate Grant of Balavarman of Prāgjōtiṣa in Āsām' (3 Pl.), *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, LXVI (1) (1897), pp. 285-297 for related incompatibilities in various copper plates found in Assam.

[26] In 1884 a list of ancient monuments in Assam was submitted to the Government of India. Gait's 1891 proposal to revise this list, which he considered grossly incomplete and unsatisfactory, was not encouraged by the Chief Commissioner William Ward. Although a scheme for including Assam along with Bengal in one of the five Archaeological Survey circles was sanctioned in 1898, no Archaeological Surveyor ever visited Assam in the nineteenth century. Dr. Bloch's 1901-1902 visit did not result in any Report. As late as 1903 it was still widely believed in the official circle that "Assam is not rich in objects of archeological interest". See correspondences in 'List of Archaeological Remains in Assam', *Assam Secretariat, General Department,*

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"Brahmin" Vedic tradition.[27] And he did not conceal his preference. The Brahmins, he said, confused different persons of the same name, often "brought together as contemporaneous persons who were widely separated in time", mythologized history and fabricated "religious tales" around historical persons.[28] This was particularly responsible, he argued, for the toponymic confusion:

> The Brahmans freely misapplied historical or other tradition to new places and conditions to subserve religious ends. Thus they transferred the story of Hariśćandra, Rohita and Śunaḥśepa and that of Purūravas to the Godāvarī in order to enhance its glory in the Gautamī-Māhātmya. They connected Rāma with the River Lauhitya (Brahmaputra), and Urvaśī with that river and also Mount Malaya.[29]

The historian's perplexity, therefore, was not due to the insufficiency of his own tools, or the inapplicability of his hypotheses, but rather developed from his encounter with an erroneous worldview that did not care to differentiate between the true and the false. When Pargiter set out to interrogate this indefensible amalgam, the cultural location of the terms and modes of his analysis was rarely hidden.

In the early eighteen nineties, Pargiter began to publish

Revenue A, January 1903, pp. 73-119 [Meghalaya State Archives].

[27] F. E. Pargiter, *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1922), Ch. 1.

[28] Pargiter, *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition*, pp. 63-77.

[29] Pargiter, *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition*, p. 71.

his thickly-footnoted translations of the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa in the 'Bibliotheca Indica' series of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Most of the notes were dedicated to spot allusions of various countries and to locate them on the map of British India. It is interesting to observe that Pargiter made no attempt to spatialize the 'cantos' LIV ('The Description of Jambu-dvīpa'), LV ('The Geography of Jambu-dvīpa') and LVI ('The Descent of the Ganges') though these were unmistakably "geographical" (if descriptions and directions of locations or landscapes are to be treated as part of geography) and described with intriguing details the six seas (respectively of saltwater, sugar-cane juice, wine, *ghee*, curdled milk and milk) separating the seven *dvīpas* (Jambu, Plakṣa, Śālmala, Kuśa, Krauṇća, Śaka and Puṣkara) as well as the seven "mountain systems" (Himavat, Hemakūṭa, Niṣadha or Ṛṣbha, Meru, Nīla, Śveta and Śṛṅgin).[30] Presumably these appeared fictive to our modern analyst,[31] and though the following two 'cantos' frequently referred to these *dvīpas*, seas and mountains, his explanatory footnotes declared that they ('Cantos' LVII and LVIII) were based on verity while the previous ones were purely mythical.

Now, the scientistic idiom of his analysis called for a justification here: where does one draw the line between the historical and the mythical in the Purāṇas? Pargiter's answer is, "There is plenty of the fabulous in Hindu geography, but it is confined, as a rule, to outside lands and the allusions to purely Indian topography are generally sober."[32] How to determine this

[30] *The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Translated with notes by F. Eden Pargiter (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1904), pp. 275-283.

[31] Cf. Francis Wilford, 'On the ancient geography in India', *Asiatick Researches*, (XIV) 1822, pp.373-470.

[32] Quoted in Hemchandra Raychaudhuri, *Studies in Indian Antiquities* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1932),p. 40.

"purely Indian topography", then? Of course, no one asked this question at that time to Pargiter and the nature of this silent agreement over the constituents of the Indian space can be approximated from the statement of Surendranath Majumdar a few years later, when he defended Pargiter saying, "As the subject of our study is the ancient geography of India and not the geographical theories of ancient Indians, we dismiss the theory of seven dvīpas [etc.] . . . and return to the sources describing India only."[33] The assumptions here were that the Indians did not need "theories" to access the reality of "India" and that this reality of an always-already existing Indian space had stayed alive from the ancient through the medieval to the modern period. It has been discussed elsewhere how colonialism and nationalism in their self-authenticatory rides continually underplay the contingency of nation-space and repress the aspects of its social production.[34] Here we confine ourselves to note Assam's discursive career as a late-coming frontier province in this imperial space of British India.

What often stood in the way of accessing the territorial through the textual were indications of multiple and mutually canceling locations of place names. Contradictions, seemingly irreconcilable within the language of history, proved to be too numerous to be evened out. Prāgjyotiṣa, for example: "Prāgjyotisha was a famous kingdom in early times and is often men-

[33] Majumdar, 'Contributions to Study of Ancient Geography', p. 119.

[34] Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994); Anne Godlewska and Neil Smith (eds.), *Geography and Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Benedict Anderson, 'Census, Map, Museum', Chapter 10, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), pp.163-185; Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India 1765 – 1843* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

tioned in the Mahā-Bhārata. The references to it, however, are rather perplexing" for it "was placed in the North region" in the Mahābhārata while in the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa it was "considered to be in the East." The Mahābhārata positioned it both next to "Antar-giri, Vahir-giri and Upa-giri", which were readily identified as "the lower slopes of the Himalayas", as well as near the ocean ("Sāgarānūpa"). Sāgarānūpa was rendered as "marshy regions" in Pargiter's translation and he inferred, "these marshy regions can only be alluvial tracts and islands near the mouths of the Ganges and Brahma-putra as they existed anciently."[35] It may be of some relevance to note here that the colonial Indologists frequently resorted to the argument of geological changes, and irregularities in logical smoothness were often contained in the name of the changing course of rivers and the nomadic habits of peoples. Macdonell and Keith's influential *Vedic Index of Names and Subjects* would be a paradigmatic example.[36] Nobin Chandra Das, a Bengal Provincial Service employee and one of the first Indians to publish a full monograph on the subject of ancient Indian toponymy, argued that places like India, Java, Mexico and Polynesia "were in closer communication with one another by land than they are at the present day" and could find references to "aurora borealis" and "submarine volcanic fire" in the Rāmāyaṇa. What requires to be mentioned is that even in the mind of this geological anarchist the cartographic image of British India was so deeply ingrained that he identified the river Nalinī of the Rāmāyaṇa with the Brahmaputra since the river in the text was said to have been "the easter-most [sic] of all rivers".[37]

[35] *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, pp.328-329n.

[36] Arthur Anthony Macdonell and Arthur Berriedale Keith, *Vedic Index of Names and Subjects*, vol. 1 (1912; Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1958), *Introduction.*

[37] Nobin Chandra Das, *A Note on the Ancient Geography of Asia: compiled from Vālmikī-Rāmāyaṇa* (1896; Varanasi: Bharat-Bharati, 1971), p. 26n.

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Inscribing the Brahmaputra, largely uncharted till the second decade of the twentieth century, on the purāṇic register posed one more difficulty for the identifier. Pargiter was certain that "[t]he people of *Lauhitya*", mentioned in the Purāṇa, "was the country on the banks of the River Lohita, or Lauhitya or Lohityā, and probably also Lohita-Gangā, the modern Brahmaputra." But the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata, the texts on whose authority he claimed to sanction this identification, also indicated "a different application" suggesting its situation "between the Ganges and Go-matī." This second Lauhitya, as it were, he associated with the sage Viśvā-mitra who "had certain descendants called Lohitas who may have been the children of his grandson Lauhi."[38]

The venture of translating the epic-purāṇic depictions of the country in the expression of habitable landscapes was fraught with other incompatibilities as well:

> [I]n some passages it is called a Mlećcha kingdom ruled over by king Bhagadatta, who is always spoken of in respectful and even eulogistic terms (e.g., Sabhā-P., xxv, 1000-1; and l. 1834; Udyoga-P., clxvi, 5804; and Karṇa-P., v, 104-5), and in other passages it is called a Dānava or Asura kingdom ruled by the demons Naraka and Muru (Vana-P., xii, 488; Udyoga-P., xlvii, 1887-92; Hari-V., cxxi, 6791-9; cxxii, 6873, etc.; and clxxiv, 9790; and annotations to Kishk.-K., xliii, in Gorresio's Rāmāyaṇa); while in some other passages the allusions seem mixed (e.g. Sabhā-P., xiii 578-80, which seems to call Bhagadatta a Yavana; and as to this, see *id.* l. 1834-6).

[38] *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, p. 357n.

"The second class of passages", Pargiter notices, "are spoilt by hyperbolical laudation."[39] Like many Indologists of his time, he believed that "[the stories] are more trustworthy when narrated simply. . . . They are open to doubt the more they are elaborated and amplified."[40] Hence, the passages that described Prāgjyotiṣa as "a Dānava or Asura kingdom" were understood as interpolated and inauthentic – solely on the evidence of their linguistic splendor. This also pushed the passages with "mixed allusions" out of consideration. Prāgjyotiṣa was a Mlećcha kingdom and consequently isolated from the main stream of the ancient Indian civilization. On the ventriloquistic testimony of the purāṇas Pargiter identified three races as the chief constituents of 'the Indian tradition': the Ailas, the Mānavas and the Saudyumnas. The "Prāgjyotiṣa kingdom … is nowhere connected with any of these races, and would seem to have been founded by an invasion of Mongolians from the north-east, though tradition is silent about this outlying development."[41] And although in the Rāmāyaṇa he came across an alternative genealogy of the Prāgjyotiṣa kings, stemming from an Aryan sovereign,[42] this did not make him change his opinion about the relative aloofness of the kingdom which he identified as western Assam and "the whole of North Bengal proper."

> The Raghu-Vamśa places it seemingly be-

[39] *Ibid*, pp. 328-329n.

[40] F. E. Pargiter, *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1922), p. 71.

[41] *Ibid*, p. 292.

[42] *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, pp. 328-329n.

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yond the Brahmaputra (iv, 81); but Kālidāsa
was a little uncertain in distant geography.[43]

Similarly, the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa's "author's knowledge of Eastern India was so hazy that he treats Kāma-rūpa as being easy of access from the Middle-Land [Madhyadeśa]."[44] What calls for our attention here is not so much the absurdity of holding Kālidāsa or the presumed "author" of the Purāṇa guilty of poor geographical knowledge, but rather the set of the unstated assumptions which discursively enabled such accusations. Pargiter was convinced that 'the ancient Indian tradition' was not only connected but also continuous, that the names Kāmarūpa and Prāgjyotiṣapura in all the narratives classed as 'ancient Indian' stood for the same slice of earth and that they formed, if not a completely disconnected, then at least an interstitial, exterior to the main body of that Tradition. Hence, when he identified Kāma-rūpa with "the western portion of Assam" for the first time in the book in the context of a story where it was said that Sva-roćis built a city there for one of his sons, Pargiter also frowned: "A town on the hill there can only be in the Himalayas in the north, or in the Garo and Khasia Hills on the south, neither seems a likely situation for an ancient *Hindu* capital."[45] For the same reason, the allusion to "Kāma-rūpa, the modern Gauhāti in Assam, . . . as [being] specially appropriate for the worship of the Sun" also seemed "unintelligible"[46] to the historian. After identifying and describing several other rivers and mountains in the northern, central, southern and western India, Pargiter turns to a line in the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa where it is said, "The Ṛishi-Kulya, and Kumārī, Manda-ga,

[43] *Ibid.*
[44] *Ibid*, xix.
[45] *Ibid*, p.411n.
[46] *Ibid*, pp. xv-xvi.

Manda-vāhinī, Kṛipa, and Palāśinī are known to spring in the Śukti-mat mountains." The footnote runs,

> These Mountains are but very rarely mentioned . . . . They were in the Eastern region, for Bhīma in his conquests in that quarter marched from Hima-vat towards Bhallāṭa and conquered the Mountain (M. Bh. Sabhā-P., xxix 1079). *Though Bhallāta does not appear to have been identified, the only noteworthy hills in the east which have not been assigned to the other great ranges are Gāro, Khāsi and Tipperah Hills which bound Bengal in that direction. Can these be the Śukti-mat Mountains? There seems to be no improbability in this, for the river Lohita or Brahma-putra and the country Kāmarūpa, which is in the Assam Valley, were known.* If this identification is satisfactory, the River *Kumārī* may be the modern Someśwat which flows southward between the Gāro and Khāsi Hills (both being names of Durgā); and the Kṛipā may perhaps be the Kapili which flows into the Brahma-putra a little above Gauhati, the ancient Kāma-rūpa; the other streams are not recognizable.[47]

Like most toponymic identifications, this was also open to challenges from within the Indological community. These mountains had previously been identified with the one to the south of

[47] *The Mārkandeya Purāna*, Translated with notes by F. Eden Pargiter (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1904), p. 306n [emphasis added].

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Sehoa and Kānker (which gives rise to the Mahanadi) by A. Cunningham and were subsequently identified with ranges as varied as the one in the north of Hazaribagh by Beglar, the Kathiwad range by C. V. Vaidya, the Sulaiman range by R. C. Majumdar and the chain of hills from Raigarh to Manbhum by H. C. Raychaudhuri.[48] But what may detain us here is not so much the comparative weakness of Pargiter's inference as his brilliant gesture to evade the unbearable blankness in the colonial litany of nomination by giving the Hills annexed by the British twenty years before to bear the cross of a purāṇic name. Here the contextual plenitude is conceived of as a continuum of structured events organized according to the same narrative logic of the exposition and this creates the effect of past as being homologously structured. Purāṇas become the site where the sequence of the constitution of the British Indian space could be rediscovered. Since the rest of the Indian space had already been flagged, the leftover and the "rarely-mentioned" could safely be assigned to the belated entrants into British India. Assam was not simply "out of place in the historical time of modernity"[49], but also an interpolated addendum in the frozen time of tradition. This was the point with which some of the nationalists were uncomfortable.

Cognates, Communities, Cartographies

In 1877 Anundram Borooah, an Assistant Magistrate by profession and an Indologist by preference, had already published his *Ancient Geography of India*, a toponymic inventory

[48] See Hemchandra Raychaudhuri, *Studies in Indian Antiquities* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1932), pp.113-120 for a summary of the different arguments.
[49] This phrase is from the conceptualization of "anachronistic space" in Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 40ff.

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collated mostly from the post-Vedic Sanskrit literature. The striking feature of this compilation was its unhesitating identifications. The ambiguities and contradictions, which would puzzle Pargiter a few years later, were simply erased out of consideration. Borooah's sources on Kāmarūpa and Prāgjyotiṣapura came mostly from the Mahābhārata and the local traditions. "To the north-east of Puṇḍra Deśa [identified with north Bengal] lay the important kingdom of Kāmarūpa, which is said to have extended from the banks of the Karatoyā to the extremities of Assam", affirmed Borooah, placing the country in the category of Eastern Countries.[50] He cited the authority of the Mahābhārata though the name "Kāmarūpa" does not occur there. And as far as Prāgjyotiṣa was concerned, Borooah did not even mention the fact that according to the description of the Sabhā Parva, it is Bhīmasena who conquers the East, Sahadeva the South, Nakula the West and Arjuna the North "while Yudhiṣṭhira the King Dharma resided in the Khāṇḍava tract" [2.23.23].[51] In the East, Bhīma vanquishes the Pāñćālas, the Gaṇḍakīs, the Videhas, the Daśārṇas, the Ćeḍis, the Kosalas, the Kāśīs, the Vaṅgas, Tāmralipti, the Suhmas and the Pauṇḍras [2.26.1-2.27.25],[52] and even crosses the river Lauhitya [2.23.27],[53] – which Borooah expectedly identified with the Brahmaputra – but does not get nearer to Prāgjyotiṣa. On the other hand, Prāgjyotiṣa is confronted by Arjuna in the north immediately after the conquests of the island of Śakala and the princes of the Seven Islands – which Borooah identified with "Sialkot in

[50] Anundram Borooah, *Ancient Geography of India* (1877; Gauhati: Publication Board, Assam, 1971), p. 68.
[51] J. A. B. van Buitenen (ed. and trans.) *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 2 (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1975), p. 77.
[52] Van Buitenen (ed. and trans.), *Mahābhārata*, vol. 2, pp. 80-82.
[53] Van Buitenen (ed. and trans.), *Mahābhārata*, vol. 2, p. 82.

Kashmere" [2.23.23].[54] Similarly in *Raghuvaṃśa*, another chief source of Borooah for identifications, the hero's conquest account places the Eastern Ocean (Purvasāgara), Suhmadeśa [IV. 35], Vaṅga [IV. 36-7], Kaliṅga (along with Utkala) and Mahendraparvata [IV. 38-43] in the East while classes the "prāgjyotiṣeśvarah", the lord of Prāgjyotiṣa, in the North along with the kings on the banks of Sindhu [IV. 67], the Huṇḍas [IV. 68], and the Kambojas [IV. 69-70].[55] The *Rāmāyaṇa* does the same.[56] And even the text from the north, *Rājataraṅginī*, says that Lalitāditya conquers Prāgjyotiṣa in the north along the Kāmbojas [IV. 165], the Tuḥkhāras [IV. 166], the Bhauṭṭas [IV. 168], the Darads [IV. 169], [IV. 171], Vālukāmbudhi [IV. 172], Strīrājya [IV. 173-174] and the Uttarakurus [IV. 175].[57] In spite of the strikingly persistent pattern of the descriptions across the texts our Indologists chose to read these *digvijaya* accounts more as veiled geographical reports than as stylized expositions in the high Sanskrit literary traditions. In the Sabhā Parva, to return to Borooah's inventory, after the triumph in Prāgjyotiṣa Arjuna moves to take control of Antar-giri, Vahir-giri and Upa-giri and then Bṛhanta or Kulūta, Paṅćadeśa, Divaḥprastha, the Trigartas, the Utsavasaṃketa gaṇas, the Dārvas, the Kokanādas, the town of Abhisārī, Uraśā, Siṃhapura, Suhmas, the Ćolas, Bāhlika, the Lohas, the Upper Kāmbojas, the Northern Ṛṣikas, the Niṣkuṭas and so on until he reaches the gate of Harivarṣa, unapproachable for a

[54] Van Buitenen (ed. and trans.), *Mahābhārata*, vol. 2, pp. 77-78.

[55] *Raghuvaṃśa*.

[56] Robert P. Goldman (ed.), *The Rāmāyaṇa* of *Vālmikī: An Epic of Ancient India*, vol. IV: Kiṣkindhyākāṇḍa, translated and annotated by Rosalind Lefeber (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

[57] *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, Translated and annotated by Ranjit Sitaram Pandit (1935; New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1968), pp. 128-134.

human being [2.23.24-25].[58] Harivarṣa, expectedly, did not find an entry in Borooah's index. He referred to the Prāgjyotiṣa king Bhagadatta's "presents to Yudhiṣṭhira in the great Rājasūya festival, viz., fine horses, jewelled ornaments and swords with hilts of pure ivory", and also justified the identification of Prāgjyotiṣa with Assam on this ground saying,

> Horses are not indigenous to Assam, but a fine breed of ponies is found in Bhootan. Elephants also are not common in Lower Assam, but still caught in the Dooars and the jungles of Upper Assam. In speaking of this province, Kālidāsa speaks of black aloe-wood and we learn from Dr. Roxburgh that that it is a tree of the eastern frontier.[59]

But the very next line in the Mahābhārata, from where these references were lifted, narrates, "Other folk from different regions, with two eyes, three eyes, or one in their foreheads, turbaned and nomadic, Bāhukas, and cannibals, and one footed tribes I saw at the gate . . ." [2.27.47].[60] Borooah (like the other Indologists), of course, never took up these regions for spatialization. The frontier province was not only demarcating the British Indian space from the foreign spaces but was also separating it from the realm of wild imaginations. Here is a perfect example of what Benjamin called the entwining of topographic vision with allegorical meaning.[61] The political-geo-

[58] Van Buitenen (ed. and trans.), *Mahābhārata*, pp. 78-80.

[59] Borooah, *Ancient Geography*, pp. 68-69.

[60] Van Buitenen (ed. and trans.), *Mahābhārata*, vol. 2, 117.

[61] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, translated Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughan, based on the German volume edited by Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 518.

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graphical fact of Assam's liminality was sharpened by its narrative situation between the knowable real and the unascertainable fabulous.[62]

It is not simply because of the ironing out of the ambivalences in order to produce a comprehensible whole of India that we call Borooah's account nationalist, but also because it was distinguished from the contemporary European Indologists' accounts in the way it employed the local traditions.[63] In fact, it was on their authority that Borooah confirmed Kāmarūpa to have been the land where Kṛṣṇa had fought Naraka, precisely the connection rejected by Pargiter as incredible:

> The ancient capital of Kāmarūpa was at Prāgjyotiṣa or Prāgjyotiṣapura on the Lauhitya, by which the Brahmaputra is generally known to the people of Upper Assam. Local tradition identifies it with modern Gauhati, lately the seat of the Lieutenant of the Assam-kings. The hill of Aśvakrānta on the other side of the river is still pointed out as the place where the demon Naraka fell and the marks of his great

[62] Similarly, when Fleet compiled a 'Topographical List of the Brihat-Samhita', he assigned to the "north-eastern division" "the Brahmaputra, the kingdom of the dead, the gold-region and the marshes or swamps", and listed among others the "nomads, the wearers of bark, the dwellers in the sky, the demons with matted hair or elf-locks, the one-footed people, and the three-eyed people" as the local residents. J. F. Fleet, 'The Topographical List of the Brihat-Samhita', *Indian Antiquary,* vol. XXII (July 1893), pp. 170-172. It might be of interest to note that Fleet did not identify the Lauhitya with the Brahmaputra.

[63] One may try to think here of an argument of 'cultural internality' that many of the nationalists employed in baffling cases of identification. See Partha Chatterjee, *A Princely Impostor? The Strange and Universal History of the Kumar of Bhawal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

> opponent Kṛṣṇa's horse's hoofs are still shown to the credulous devotees who flock the temple or bathe in the sacred waters of the river.[64]

However, it is necessary to observe here that recounting of national glory through the nagging gray litanies of toponymic inventories and dictionaries took diverse forms and the legitimacy of local oral traditions was severely contested by several Indian scholars. The process of production of the authentic local, many of them began to recognize, was fraught through numerous difficulties. The 'original name' of Tezpur in Assam – it was almost a consensus among the middle class intelligentsia of the province by the end of the nineteenth century – was Śoṇitapura, the capital of the Prāgjyotiṣa king Vāṇa. The consensus was certainly assisted by the fact that both the names meant, respectively in Assamese and Sanskrit, 'the city of blood'. Hem Chandra Goswami, an Extra Assistant Commissioner at Tezpur and "an authority on the Assamese antiquities", reported that

> the town was called and known as Śoṇitapur' till the British occupation of the country. A certain Deputy Commissioner changed it to 'Tezpur' to make it pure Assamese, it is said. ... According to local traditions a large number of people were killed in the battle that was fought between Vāṇa and Śrīkṛṣṇa, so much so that the waters of the Brahmaputra became quite red with blood.

[64] Borooah, *Ancient Geography*, pp. 68-69.

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Another Indological giant, Padmanatha Bhattacharyya Vidyavinoda, dryly remarked,

> I do not think, however, that the capital of so mighty a prince as Vāṇa bore such an inauspicious name as 'blood-city'; and I am rather inclined to believe that śoṇita' as an adjective here means 'red', so that its meaning is 'red-city' instead of what is signified by the Assamese versions.

Hence,

> This popular interpretation falls to the ground when we remember that the city had no other name in the purāṇas while spoken of even before that bloody battle was fought. It is the nature of the common people often to misinterpret a name and then invent what is called a folk-tale to support it.[65]

This particular confusion was not to be conclusively settled within the parameters of Indological discourse, and the idea that hunting for history in 'folktales' would be necessarily self-defeating continued to hold extensive ground among the Indologists, particularly those who were writing from outside of the province. Therefore, when Nundo Lal Dey published the first edition of his *Geographical Dictionary of Ancient and Medieval India* in 1899, even now considered as a useful compendium in many of the Indian universities, he chose to remain faithful to the established way of purely textual studies. "[T]ime has mutilated or obscured the ancient names of places that usually figure in the historical narratives … almost out of recognition", a remorseful Dey complained. "The restoration of the altered derivatives to their genuine originals", however, seemed perfectly achievable in view of the fact that most of the changes are found not to have taken place haphazardly. Barring names displaced by new ones by some cause or other, they appear in most cases to be governed by the rules of the Prākṛt grammars, except where the peculiar brogue of a particular place has checked or modified the application of the rules.[66]

Thus grammar became the perfect reflection of the order that is to be found both in the 'haphazardness' of time and in that of the local traditions. Dey suggested ten "rules" for identification, porous enough to sponge in all diversities and exactly for that reason sneered at by the later workers in the field.[67]

Dey was not insensitive to the question of contradictory references. Apart from Assam, he identified two other locations of the Kāmākhyā pītha in the purāṇic literature, one in the Punjab near the river Devīkā which, he significantly informed, was still "a place of pilgrimage" and the other was

[65] Padmanatha Bhattacharyya Vidyavinoda, 'Notes on Certain Archaeological Remains at Tezpur (Assam)', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal: New Series*, vol. 5 (1909), p. 19n.

[66] Nundo Lal Dey, 'The Geographical Dictionary of Ancient and Medieval India', Supplement to *Indian Antiquary*, XLVIII (1919), p. i.

[67] Namely, Change of Affixes, Elisions, Change of Consonants, Nasals, Semi-Vowels, Change of Aspirates, Compound Letters and Interchanging, Change of Vowels, Disseverance of Compound Letters, Transposition of Letters, Synonyms, Abbreviations and Compounding of Letters. *Ibid*, pp. i-x. See Law, *Historical Geography*, p. 53 for criticisms.

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Māyāpurī, near Benares.[68] Similarly, the troubling question of Prāgjyotiṣa's direction (north or east?) was addressed in the form of suggesting two separate locations for the ancient kingdom – one in Assam, and the other "on the bank of the river Betwā or Betrāvatī."[69] Lohitya was identified with the Brahmaputra, while Lohitya-Sarovara was separately catalogued as "[t]he source of the river Ćandrabhāgā or Ćināb in Lahoul or middle Tibet."[70] But, for Dey, these divergences did not stand in the way of imagining an uninterrupted history of Assam beginning from the age of the Mahābhārata to the time of Buchanan's tour in Rangpur. With a little help from etymology, Dey managed to dole out an answer to the baffling interruption of the Tibeto-Burman Ahom kings:

> The word 'Ahom' is perhaps a corruption of Bhauma, as the descendants of Narakāsura were called.[71]

Principles of an inclusive nationalism, which subsumed every trace of difference within the folds of an eternal irremovable sameness, were at work here. All differences had their places; all forms were on record; but, as in a grammar, all were connected in hierarchical relations – the originals and the corruptions, the essentials and the ephemerals. For the nationalist Indologists writing for a subcontinental middle class readership, the structure of Indianness was not very different from that envisioned by the European pioneers in the field.

But a rather different cartography of the nation was being

[68] Nundo Lal Dey, *The Geographical Dictionary of Ancient and Medieval India* (1899; London: Luzac & Co., 1927), p. 86

[69] *Ibid*, p. 158.

[70] *Ibid*, p. 115.

[71] *Ibid*, p. 87.

prepared at the provincial level. The search for a respectable location in the map of the Indian tradition particularly haunted the early twentieth century middle class Assamese intelligentsia, fashioning a new idiom of selfhood that was sharpened through an intimate and complex relationship with the intelligentsia of Calcutta, the colonial epicenter. We can turn here to look at the paradigmatic case of A. C. Agarwala, who had been writing in the Assamese periodical *Bāhi* on the toponymic identifications for the local audience for quite some time. In 1921 he published a booklet in English in order to

> draw the attention of all Vedic scholars, antiquarians, and the historical and geographical societies to the fact that a stream of Aryan families came down from Thibet [sic] through the passes of the Eastern Himalaya into Upper Assam and settled there. It was from Assam [that] they migrated to other places in Burma and Northern India.[72]

Predictably, the organon of Agarwala's discourse was etymology: "The Brahmaputra is called Dirhang or Dihang in the Sadiya Frontier Tract. The Vedic name of this river was Drisadvati [sic] that has now corrupted to Dihang." Sarasvatī, another Vedic river that continues to cause controversy among the present-day historians, was identified by Agarwala at one place with Suban-sri[73] and at another with Brahmaputra. The presumed etymological trajectory in the second case was rather complicated: Sarasvatī to Halawati to Hlawti to Lowit to Lohit.[74] In

[72] A. C. Agarwala, *Notes on the Ancient History of Assam*, Part 1: Vedic Period (Dibrugarh: Assamiya Press, 1921), preface.

[73] *Ibid.*

[74] *Ibid*, p. 11.

the same manner, the famous Sapta Sindhu region was identified with Sadiya, Ākāśa with the Aka Hills, Bhūtasthāna with Bhutan and Dyouḥ with the Daphla Hills; the Boḍos were given to carry the name of Varuṇa and Dukku in the Abor Hills was understood as the nomological residue of Dakśa.[75]

Once these major Vedic pointers could be positioned on the landscape of Assam, the rest of the sacred geography was a piece of cake:

> The outer hills between the Drisadvati (now Dihang) and Saraswati (now Suban-Sri) inhabited by the Aryans were known afterwards as Brahmavarta [sic]. The easternmost point of the Himalayas was probably the Mount Meru or Ila mentioned in the Vedas, and Adi Sharga [sic] was at the foot of the same watered by the Dib or Dibāng and Dik or Dikrang rivers.

All this clearly showed, according to Agarwala, that "[t]he Aryans compiled their earliest sacred books such as [the] Vedas and [the] Upanishads when they lived in Upper or the North-Eastern part of Assam. The Eastern Aryans (Devas and Brahmas) probably met the Western or Iranian Aryans in the Punjab."[76]

The name of Prāgjyotiṣa, therefore, was invested with a semantic immensity:

[75] *Ibid*, pp. 15-17.

[76] *Ibid*, *preface*.

> The Aryan civilization dawned in Assam, the land of the rising sun of India. It was justly called Prag-jyotish [Prāgjyotiṣa], i.e. the light of the East. This light travelled towards the east and west and illuminated Burma and the eastern Peninsula and the whole of northern India.[77]

In other words, Agarwala's formulation inverted, though did not displace, the discursive hierarchy of Indianness: the frontier province of British India had not been on the fringes of Vedic India; on the contrary, it had been the provenance of the Aryan civilization. The logic of the originary, however, was sustained. And the foundational fiction of an essentially Indian space continued to work. Places changed their places and, at the same time, remained stationary. This had a curious double function to offer: on the one hand, Agarwala could strengthen the contemporary upward mobility movement of the local middle castes saying that "[i]t is a great mistake to suppose that the Brahmans and Kayasthas of Assam came from Bengal. [Rather,] The word Kaietha (now Kayastha) seems to be a corruption of the Assamese 'Kalita'"[78]; on the other hand, he could reconcile the colonial grudge of inhabiting a largely ignored frontier province by claiming an indispensable interiority within the space of the essential nation.

That Assam was indisputably internal to the cultural geography of India was also the key contention of Nagendra Nath Vasu who published the first of his three-volume *Social His-*

[77] *Ibid*, p. 36.

[78] *Ibid*, 24. It may be of some interest to note that he uses Dalton, Gait and the Census Reports to prove this point, vide p. 40f.

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tory of Kāmarūpa in the next year, 1922. Promising to set forth "as faithful a picture as possible of that glorious land of hallowed memory, known as Kāmarūpa"[79], Vasu described the province as "a federation-hall" where "the most ancient and the most modern" of races and (rather interestingly) of "philosophical schools" had met in perfect harmony. Assam was a synecdoche of an inclusive and integrative India, and therefore, must be studied by "not only the historian or the archaeologist, but all those who would study nationalism and try to understand the very interesting history of the rise and fall of a nation."[80]

Vasu opened his account with a rereading of the *R*g-Veda. In the first few pages his protagonists were the Paṇis, whom he placed in a more advanced civilizational state than their undying enemies, the Vedic Aryans. Demonstrating from the textual evidence that cattle wealth was the major source of their affluence, he argued that they had inaugurated civilization in India, and though now largely forgotten, their memory was still alive in the Hindustani name for the cream of milk, *panir*. Almost instantaneously he identified these Vedic Paṇis with two present-day castes, the Pani-Koch in North Bengal and Assam and the Paniār in the Deccan. Presumably considering the phonic semblance an irrefutable proof of identity in itself, Vasu did not trouble himself to quote any other grounds for this identification.[81] The second level of identification involved none other than the Phoenicians: "we do unhesitatingly regard the Paṇis also as a branch of the ancient Sumerian race and as identical in blood, and faith, manners and customs with the ancient

[79] *Ibid*, p.1.

[80] Nagendra Nath Vasu, *The Social History of Kāmarūpa*, vol. 1 (1922; New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1983), p. 2.

[81] *Ibid*, (1922; New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1983), p. 33.

Phoenicians."[82] Besides phonic correspondence, however, Vasu here cited nine other points of similarity. Both (i) were of "blood-red or dark-brown complexion", (ii) dwelled in the caves (iii) erected "symbolic pillars" of worship, (iv) worshipped motifs of male and female genitalia, (v) offered animal – and occasionally human – sacrifices to deities, (vi) practiced maiden worship, (vii) shared the same mode of burial, (viii) had kings officiating as high-priests, and (ix) lived in women-dominated societies.[83]

In the vortex of eclectic reasoning, spaces began to be shuffled: the Red Sea that Herodotus mentioned in connection with the Phoenicians was of course the Lohita Sāgara mentioned in the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata, which was again nothing other than the Lauhitya, the Sanskrit name of the Brahmaputra or the Luit;[84] the biblical kingdom of Ophir was Sauvīra;[85] the Mittanis were the Mitrānikas; the Kassites were associated with Kāśī and Kharri was a derivative of Kṣatriya.[86] While seemingly it was rather difficult "to definitely localize

[82] *Ibid*, pp. 52-53. Begun in 1802, the decipherment of the Akkadian language was considered assured in 1847, and by 1900 Sumerian was also claimed to have been broadly comprehended. Excavations in Iraq started in the early eighteen forties. The success of the amateurs like Paul Emile Botta [Khorsabad: Assyrian 1843], Henry Layard [Nimrud and Nineveh 1845], Ernest de Sarzec [Telloh: Sumerians 1877], Loftus and Smith in the second half of the nineteenth century, and eventually of the professional archaeologists such as Robert Kóldewey at Babylon (1899-1917), Walter Andrae at Assur (1903-1914) and of course C. Leonard Woolley at Ur (1922-1934) received enormous press coverage. All this probably excited Vasu's imagination. A concise history of archaeological researches in Iraq may be obtained in Georges Roux, *Ancient Iraq* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), pp. 41- 46.

[83] Vasu, *Social History of Kāmarūpa*, p. 56ff.

[84] *Ibid*, p. 68.

[85] *Ibid*, p. 24.

[86] *Ibid*, pp. 29-30.

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th[e] *mlećcha* land"[87], Vasu soon found the name Melchi-dezek, a royal Assyrian priest, in the Book of Genesis and argued that "[i]t is not unlikely that the high-priests of the Asuras or Assyrians were regarded as mlećchas and dvijas or Melchi-dezeks. . . . "[88] This was followed by a discussion of the similarities of manners, customs and practices of faith between the ancient peoples of Asia Minor and Assam.[89] It should be noted here that the presumed Sumerian connection would continue to fascinate the antiquarian research in Assam for years to come.[90]

Alexander's historians mentioned a place called Patalene. Vasu asserted that it must have been the Pātāla of the Purāṇas, ruled by the king Valin. Learning from the 1876 Sind Gazetteer that there was "a tradition current in Cutch and Sindh" according to which Vāṇa and Naraka ruled there, he reasoned that Śoṇitapura, usually identified with Tezpur in Assam, had originally been the capital of the Sumāras in Sindh. That Vāṇa (by the early twentieth century who came to be identified as Valin's descendant and Naraka's friend) had been a Sumāra king, and that he had migrated to Assam with a large section of his community and established there a second capital of the same name were also easy facts for Vasu. This enabled him, in turn, to explain the Tantric allusion to the Saumāra Pīṭha in Kāmarūpa.[91] This is what Walter Benjamin calls the "evocative power" in the toponyms: "what is decisive here is not the association but the interpenetration of images."[92] Ishtar's pillars and

[87] *Ibid*, p. 114.
[88] *Ibid*, p. 126.
[89] *Ibid*, pp. 126-30.
[90] See, for example, B. A. Saletore, 'A Sumerian Custom and Its Historic Indian Parallels', *Journal of Assam Research Society* , IV: 1 (April 1936), pp. 1-10.
[91] Vasu, *Social History of Kāmarūpa*, pp. 101-103.
[92] Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, p. 518.

Kāmākhyā's temple, the Royal Cemetery of Ur and the Ahom tombs at Nowgong crossed each other to produce an intricate figure of identity that was densely mixed and yet recognizably original:

> It is thus a matter of no small congratulation to ourselves that this sacred land of ours was also the cradle of that primitive race of traders, who, over four thousand years back, carried the torch of civilization to Assyria, Babylon, Greece and other ancient countries.[93]

For Vasu – who could connect Vāṇa's wife Kirmi with the Cimmerians, the oldest inhabitants of Scythia,[94] or discover "a faint allusion . . . in Ferishtā" suggesting that Afrasiab came to Kāmarūpa[95] – reading Garuḍāćala into the Gāro Hills or associating the Mandehā Rākṣasas of the Rāmāyaṇa with the Yoginī Tantra's Mandaśaila were certainly less laborious undertakings. But what must be placed on record is the ease with which he shuttled between Encyclopaedia Britannica, high Sanskrit texts, ethnographic information, findings of archaeological excavations and local oral traditions. Consider his treatment of the well-known Paraśurāma story, for example. Interlacing the eighteenth century Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa of Balarām Dvija with a fairly common lore in post-census Assam, Vasu (who was also a leading member of the Kāyastha Sabhā movement in Bengal) contended that Paraśurāma, the famous purāṇic Kṣatriya-annihilator, had cursed seven dissident Brahmin families in

[93] Vasu, *Social History of Kāmarūpa*, p. 23.
[94] *Ibid*, pp. 106-110.
[95] *Ibid*, p. 110.

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Kāmarūpa, from whom the 'tribes' of Assam eventually descended. Three of these families came to be known as Mishmis, two as Abors, one as Daphla and the other as Miri. The argument, again, was chiefly etymological: 'Diju Mishmi' was a corrupt derivation of 'Dvija Miśra', 'Digāru Mishmi' of 'Dvijavara Miśra', and 'Miri' of the [Vedic] 'Gṛhamedhikas'.[96] Dalton and his lot – Vasu was in agreement with Kamalakanta Bhattacharya and Padmanath Bhattacharya, two other specialists on Assam – had "carelessly" and mistakenly classed these communities as Mongoloids: "[they] must have come down from the Vedic Aryans"[97] Traces of Vedic rituals and customs were soon detected, not excluding the suggestion of identifying the Vedic *soma* with tea,[98] and the unresolved dissimilarities were assigned away saying "it is for the Ethnologist and the Philologist, and not for an humble writer of social history like myself, to look for those natural, physical or political causes which have brought about such remarkable changes in the languages and circumstances of this ancient people."[99]

It is most crucial to note that these formulations could not have been easily brushed aside by the contemporary specialists as uninformed mutterings of a semi-educated mofussil pretender to academic fame. A respected figure in the Indological circle of early twentieth century, Nagendra Nath Vasu Prāćyavidyāmahārṇava Siddhāntavāridhi was the editor (and also a chief contributor) of *Viśvakoṣa*, the famous twenty-two-volume encyclopedia in Bengali. Apart from his major contribution in lexicography (*Śabdendu Mahākoṣa*), Vasu was

[96] *Ibid*, pp. 86-89.

[97] *Ibid*, p. 86.

[98] *Ibid*, p. 94n.

[99] *Ibid*, p. 91.

also in charge of the critical and scholarly editions of several important old vernacular manuscripts, the editor of the prestigious 'Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā', the president of the Virabhūmi Anusāndhān Samiti, a prominent member of the Philological Committee of the Asiatic Society, the decipherer of the Śuśunia and Madanpāla Inscriptions and an untiring collector of archaeological evidences in Orissa.[100] Where did then, one might legitimately ask, the boundary between disciplinary knowledge and unruly phantasms begin in the colonies?

Disciplined Knowledges, Shared Fantasies

It was way back in 1894 that an entire Directorate of Ethnography was established in the province at the behest of Edward Gait in order "to catalogue and rescue from oblivion" the historical records of Assam. Within three years of its inception Gait published his famous 'Report on the Progress of Historical Research in Assam' which was a digest of several "source materials" of Assamese history. What distinguished this digest was its emphasis on non-Sanskrit manuscripts, contractual documents and ethnographic accounts.[101] Pitted as reliable elements of the region's history against the obliquity of the interpolation-ridden, tortuous high Sanskrit narratives, these items formed a very different order of evidences. The implications of this shift were fully fleshed out in 1906 when, on their basis, Gait published his *History of Assam*, still celebrated as one of the most authoritative texts on the subject.

[100] Subodhchandra Sengupta, *Saṃsad Bāṅgālī Ćaritābhidhān* (Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad, 1988), pp. 234-235.

[101] Edward Gait, *Report on the Progress of Historical Research in Assam* (Gauhati: Directorate of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, 1897).

The *History* opened with a mistrust of the "dubious and fragmentary references in the *Mahābhārat* [sic], and in the *Purāns* [sic] and Tantras and other similar records." Though these stories "are fondly remembered by the people", Gait was convinced that they "cannot of course be dignified with the name of history". Gait immediately modified this reservation saying that "[t]hey may, however, contain a substratum of fact",[102] but the historiographical break with which he is credited in the context of Assam primarily consisted of his brush-off to the array of Sanskrit literature that had so far been regarded as the only means to access the ancient history of Assam. Without minimizing the significance of this innovative move, it is possible to open this claim/ ascription to further problematization. Like many of the colonial officials of his time, Gait held that caste system was a more useful pointer than language of the racial trace of the colonized (what he posed as a central problematic of his narrative)[103] , and therefore he was not ready to accept the presiding role of etymology, over the methodological discourse of history, as championed by Indology – history's colonial surrogate. Ethnographic observations and unearthed inscriptions for the pre-Buranji period were his favourite sources, but that did not take him beyond, according to his own calculations, the fourth century. Yet there was already quite a considerable volume of writings from the Indological space that, as we have seen, claimed to place the history of Assam at the beginning of the Epic Age. Gait was not ready to desert the space of toponymic identification to these amateurs. He decided to turn the tables on them.

That "[s]ome three or four thousand years ago" there had

[102] Edward Gait, *A History of Assam* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co, 1906.), p. 1.
[103] *Ibid*, p. 3ff.

been an "influx of tribes of Mongolian origin" through Assam was Gait's founding deduction from close ethnographic inspections. The next conjecture was that the Bodos formed one such tribe and certainly ruled a vast stretch of the valley and the hills. This judgment was fashioned within the prevailing terms of etymologically charged toponymic discourse.

> The wide extent and long duration of Bodo domination is shown by frequent occurrence of the prefix *di* or *ti*, the Bodo word for water, in the river names of the Brahmaputra valley and the adjoining country to the west, e.g., Dibru, Dikhu, Dihing, Dihong, Dibong, Disang, Diphang, Dimla etc. in some cases old names are disappearing – the Dichu river, for instance, is now better known as the Jaldhāka [sic] – while in others it has already gone, as in the case of the Brahmaputra, which in the early days of Ahom rule was known as the Ti-lao. The latter word was doubtless the origin of another old name for this river, viz., Lohit or Lau-hitya (red). This name has another derivation in Sanskrit literature, where the water is said to be so called that because Parasurām washed off his bloody stains in it, but there are numerous similar instances of the invention of such stories to explain names taken from the aboriginal languages. Thus the Kosi derives its name from *Khussi*, the Newār word for river, but it is connected in Hindu legends

> with Kusik [sic] Raja; and the Tistā, though its first syllable is clearly Bodo *di* or *ti*, is regarded by the Hindus as a corruption of *trishna*, "thirst", or *trisrota*, "three springs".[104]

Gait's fascinating move involved a series of inversions[105] : Boḍo as the original and Sanskrit as the corruption; folklores came first and the purāṇic legends followed; the Mongoloid as the residuum and the Aryan as the superstructure. But the methodological nuts and bolts were not really very different from the contemporary Indological discourse. Gait further asserted,

> the fact that, compared with the Bodo tribes, [the Ahoms] have left so few marks on the toponymy of the country may perhaps be taken to show that the period for which the latter were supreme was far longer than that for which the Ahoms are known to have ruled.[106]

One may read this curious piece of reasoning along with Gait's treatment of 'the Nidhanpur Grant Plate', supposedly the most useful inscriptional evidence in preparing an extensive, if discontinuous, genealogy of the kings classed as belonging to the Varmaṇa dynasty. It might be interesting to know how the dating of these kings was achieved. The second name in this list was Samudravarmaṇa, and most of the contemporary Indologists

[104] *Ibid*, p. 7.
[105] The move was, to some extent, inaugurated by S. E. Peal, 'A peculiarity of the river names in Asām and some of the adjoining countries', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, XLVIII (1) (1879), pp. 258-270.
[106] Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 7.

agreed that the name in itself was a sufficient proof of the fact that this Assam king was a contemporary of, or ruled a little later than, Samudragupta, the Imperial Gupta ruler. Gait raised his imagined chronology principally on this identification.[107] Apart from adding another instance to Dilip Chakrabarti's informed criticism of "the remarkably flimsy and subjective lines of arguments on which the entire system of Indian chronology is based",[108] this also shows how the search for a stabilizing idiom in names, of persons or places, in order to render the recalcitrant pasts coherent and continuous, continued to govern the new historical imagination even when it claimed to break free from the absurd elasticity of etymology. In much the same old Indological way, Gait continued to whisper to his readers that Kuṇḍina survived in the name of the Kundil River at Sadiya,[109] Vidarbha might have been a kingdom somewhere around Sadiya,[110] and Prāgjyotiṣa referred to "the reputation which the country has always held as a land of magic and incantation".[111]

The focus of Gait's *History*, however, was on the Ahom period and though it had a considerable, if unintended, success in exciting a sense of pride among the Assamese intelligentsia, the pursuit for a respectable place in the high Sanskrit tradition (in which the Mongoloid vestige seemed a misfit[112]) did not

[107] *Ibid*, pp. 22-23.
[108] Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *Colonial Indology: Sociopolitics of the Ancient Indian Past* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1997), pp. 152-166. However, Chakrabarti's unreflexive nationalist position leads him to treat the 'system' of toponymic identification as rather unproblematic.
[109] Gait, *History*, p.16.
[110] *Ibid*, p. 15.
[111] *Ibid*.
[112] For a very typical response to this question, see Padmanath Bhattacharya, *Mr. Gait's History of Assam: A Critical Study* [reprinted from 'The Hindustan Review', 1908] (Allahabad: The Indian Press, 1908), p. 2ff.

really end. Within the more avowedly scientistic crease of the historical discipline the local Indological imagination now started to work its way. Gait's efforts, including his book, inspired many of the Assamese *śrījuts* to organize themselves into a non-official research society, much on the lines of the district-level Bengal and Bihar Societies, patronized by individual government officials and local notables. In 1912, the Kāmarūpa Anusandhāna Samiti was established to assemble evidences and source materials of Assamese history on a larger scale, with Gait as one of its major patrons. Initially Hemchandra Goswami, Padmanatha Bhattacharyya Vidyavinoda and Kanaklal Barua were the chief enthusiasts and a systematic search for old Assamese manuscripts in the *sattras* and old households soon began. However, after the death of Goswami in 1928, Kanaklal Barua became the key person in the Kāmarūpa Anusandhāna Samiti and when Suryya Kumar Bhuyan resigned from the post of secretary to join the Directorate of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Barua had a chance to return the main research interest of the Samiti to the old Indological tradition of analysis of Sanskrit texts. In 1933 Barua published his *Early History of Kāmarūpa*, which proved to be very popular among the local educated, and also started an English quarterly, *Journal of Assam Research Society*, both predominantly concerned with narrating the old glory of Kāmarūpa. In these new registers of antiquarian research toponymic discussion reoccupied its place of importance in debates over the 'Assamese' pasts.

Barua replied to Gait's theory by identifying the Boḍo with the Varāha Mountains of the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mech-Boḍos with the Mlecćhas and the Koches with the Kuvāćas or Kavaćas[113]

[113] Kanaklal Barua, *Early History of Kāmarūpa* (1933; Guwahati: Lawyer's Book Stall, 1966).

["The people of the Boḍo tribes were in no sense untouchables at any time. Even now in Assam good Brāhmiṇs take water fetched by a Koch."[114]], restoring the old line of argument that Assam had always been within the folds of epic-purāṇic geography. But what marked this renewed defense of the early Indological tradition of toponymic identifications was an extremely sensitive attitude towards exact determination of boundaries of Kāmarūpa. Challenging Anundram Borooah's explanation, Barua declared that the Puṇḍra Deśa of the purāṇas was not the Gupta name for North Bengal, Puṇḍravarddhanabhukti, but rather south Bihar, and through convoluted readings of purāṇic texts he affirmed that the western boundary of the Kāmarūpa kingdom extended up to the Kośī river or Videha.[115] In a paragraph which scuttled across a remarkable mishmash of sources – from the Ākbarnāmāh to the eighteenth century local traditions of Assam – Barua claimed a larger space for the kingdom of Kāmarūpa frozen in mythic time:

> We know that the racial, linguistic and cultural affinities, between Mithilā and Kāmarūpa, at one time, were very close. In fact, during the zenith of the rule of the kings of Puṣyavarman's dynasty, between sixth and the eighth centuries, perhaps the whole of Mithilā was within the Kāmarūpa kingdom. [O]n the authority of the Ākbarnāmāh, Kāmarūpa included Puraniyā in the sixteenth century. ... Those who now find it hard to believe that the Kāmarūpa kingdom extended, at any time, as far west

[114] Kanaklal Barua, 'A Rejoinder', *Journal of Assam Research Society*, IV: 1 (April, 1936), pp. 15-18.

[115] *Ibid*, p. 2n.

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as the Kośī will be relieved to learn that, in ancient times, the Kośī was very much near to modern Assam and that according to local tradition, collected 120 years ago, it was once a tributary of the Assam River, Lauhitya or Brahmaputra.[116]

It may seem equally strategic that Barua's concerns about the boundaries of Kāmarūpa were absolutely confined to the west of Assam and he, like all other Indologists on the issue, never bothered to demarcate the proposed Kāmarūpa's eastern boundaries. A larger share in the British Indian space was an immediate assurance of a more decent place in 'the great Indian tradition'. Claiming that "[t]he assumption made by some historians that Ādityasena of the later Gupta family was the paramount power over Eastern India after Śri-Harṣa's death can no longer hold good", Barua ascertained, "after the death of Emperor Śri-Harṣa the Bhauma kings of the dynasty of Bhagadatta were the paramount rulers in Eastern India."[117]

Many of Barua's contemporaries were equally keen in overstretching Kāmarūpa's boundaries, not only claiming most of the surrounding areas of the province,[118] but also often declaring relatively far-away places like Andhra to have been old colonies of Kāmarūpa.[119] But multiple references of the weak

[116] Kanaklal Barua, 'Stray Notes on Buchanan's Account of Purnea', *Studies in the Early History of Assam: A collection of papers published in research journals on aspects of the history and culture of Assam*, ed. Maheswar Neog (Jorhat-Gauhati: Kanaklal Barua Birth Centenary Celebration Committee, Assam Sahitya Sabha, 1973), p. 7.

[117] Kanaklal Barua, 'Kāmarūpa in the Sixth Century AD', *Journal of Assam Research Society*, I: 3 (October, 1933), pp. 55-68.

[118] G. Barua, 'Asamata Bauddhadharmar Cin', *Jonākī* IV: 6 (1892), p. 142

[119] 'History of the Gavāras' by one P. Seetaramaiiah was very warmly re-

imperial fantasy of the colonized should not lead us to believe that this new sensitivity over Kāmarūpa's boundary was simply aggressive and expansive. It could also be orchestrated to effect precise tactical withdrawals. For example, Barua who (like most of the contemporary *dāngarīyās* and *bhadraloks*) considered "Tantra and Vajrayāna" as "immoral" and "degraded" versions of the original lofty ideals of Buddhism and the purāṇas, never agreed with the fairly common siting of the Oiḍḍyāna-pīṭha, a renowned Tantric center, within Assam. In a paper fully devoted to renounce this ascription Barua concluded after complex and unenviable calculations that "just outside the boundary of Kāmarūpa was Oiḍḍyāna."[120] At the same time, for claiming reputable traditions the absence of reference to Kāmarūpa or Prāgjyotiṣapura did not pose a problem. On the "internal evidence" of no more than seven words [Śāli: name for paddy in Assam valley; Bhālluka: a predominantly Assamese variety of bamboo; Bhora, pala, śāka: units of measurement; Jāngāla: area with little rainfall; Gunā: gold thread], which were claimed to have been used in the Arthaśāstra in the same sense, Barua deduced that its author "had close intercourse with the people of north-eastern India even if he was not himself an Alpine Brahmin hailing from that corner of India" albeit neither Kāmarūpa

ceived in the Assam research Society circle as the book argued that Komātis, a trading caste of Andhra, had come from Kamatā of Assam and that the Kākatiyas were associated with the Kākatis, the writer caste of Assam. See P. Seetaramaiiah, 'History of the Gavāras', *Journal of the Andhra Historical Research Society*, VIII: 2 and 3 (1933). Also See *Journal of Assam Research Society*, II: 1 (April, 1934), pp. 25-27.

[120] Kanaklal Barua, 'Kāmarūpa and Vajrayāna' *Journal of Assamese Research Society*, II: 2 (July, 1934), pp. 44-49. It is important to note that when Rajmohan Nath tried to claim old glories for the now-ignored Nath community in the early 1940s, he vigorously argued that Oḍḍiyāna was in Assam. Rajmohan Nath, *Kadali-rājya* (Gauhati: Author, 1941). It has been discussed in some details in my 'Kāmākhyā's Sheep: Space, Sexuality and the Colonial Career of a Stereotype'.

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nor Prāgjyotiṣapura finds a mention in the text. To strengthen his case, Barua pointed out that the description of the fabric Dukūla in the text vividly reminded him of the Assam moogas. Moreover, there was a full chapter on magic or 'Secret Means', while Kāmarūpa and Kāmākhyā charms were still famous.[121]

Eventually, Barua found a more ingenious way of claiming an indisputable internality to essential Indianness. In 'Stemming of the Tide of Muslim Conquest in Eastern India' he declared, "It is the only province in Northern India which the Mussalmans, in spite of all their attempts, from the thirteenth down to the seventeenth century, could not conquer."[122] If one could believe – and all our scholars did believe – that Assam had always been lying within the 'historical geography' of purāṇic India, then its successful resistance to the armies of the Bengal Sultans and Delhi Badshahs could be interpreted with no trouble as having kept it a reservoir of the pure uncontaminated fundamental Indianness. This argument of Barua seemed equally agreeable to Suryya Kumar Bhuyan, whose evident discomfort with "the romancings, inventions and exaggerations of uncritical history-writers" made him feel closer to Gait's 'scientific history' than Barua's Indological imaginings,[123] and it was on this point that his statist history of the Ahoms could quietly cross Barua's culturalist accounts. In *Anglo-Assamese Relations, 1771-1826 A.D.*, Bhuyan argued that "[t]he basis of [Ahom] Assam's foreign relations was the remembrance of the limits of the ancient Hindu Kingdom of Kamarupa . . . The ultimate territorial ambition of the Ahoms was to restore the old limits up to the Karatoya river, and they succeeded at times to bring parts of the ancient territories under their domination or under their political influence.[124]

When certain Bengal sultans' coins were found, which had the toponym "kamru" embossed on them, Barua contended that this must be a false claim, because whenever the Muslims crossed some river in Eastern Bengal, they mistakenly thought they were in Kamru. This 'Kamru' was not Kāmarūpa. In order to produce the invincible archive of Kāmarūpa, etymology had to be reined in. To this demand numismatics and epigraphy had to submit.[125] When an inscription of the Paramāra king Vākpatirāja of Malwa containing a reference to the Uttarkuladeśa was unearthed in 1938, Barua insisted that the north of Brahmaputra should be understood by the term and not the north of the Ganges, as the Director-General of the Ar-

[121] K. L. Barua, 'Was Kautilya an Easterner?' *Journal of Assam Research Society*, VII: 3 (October 1939), pp. 83-86.

[122] Kanaklal Barua, 'Stemming of the Tide of Muslim Conquest in Eastern India', *Journal of Assam Research Society*, III: 2 (July, 1935), pp. 247-259.

[123] Tension between the Governmental agencies and the unofficial researchers became evident in the contemporary writings. In a review of the Second Directorate of Historical and Antiquarian Studies Bulletin in the *Journal of Assam Research Society* Kanaklal Barua regretted the fact that Bhuyan had not brought up the names of his Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti or Padmanath Bhattacharya Vidyavinod: "Any writer on historical research in Assam is bound not simply to mention but to gratefully acknowledge the valuable work done by the Society and Paṇḍit Vidyāvinod." Since Bhuyan criticized "the romancings, inventions and exaggerations of uncritical history-writers" while significantly emphasizing the need for "the laborious and scientific reconstruction" and "original research", Barua retorted by saying that neither of the two "is confined only to himself and his comrades in the Government." See *Bulletin II of the* Directorate of Historical and Antiquarian Studies *in Assam*, 23 February, 1934 and *Journal of Assam Research Society*, II: 1 (April 1934), pp. 28-30.

[124] Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, 23.

[125] One must mention here the effort with which Padmanath Bhattacharya's influential *Kāmarūpaśāsanāvalī* (Rangpur: Rangpur Sahitya Parishat, 1338b) tried to strike a balance between the two orders of evidence. I specially call attention to his strategic invocation of epic-purāṇic authority in resolving the incompatibilities arising out of his reading of coins and copper plates.

chaeological Survey, K. N. Dikshit, suggested.[126]

If one is not really impressed with the originality of Barua's identifications, one has to be certainly struck by the way in which his identifications stood to expose the hollowness of the claim of superiority by the contending and established identifications. If Barua's methods seem thin and unreasonable today, it is to be remembered that they often represented extreme cases of spatial identificatory practices that formed the staple of the established high Indological texts as well. Methodologically speaking, Barua was certainly competent in his contemporary terms. The problem was elsewhere, as Barua poignantly recognized in one of his most provocative essays, 'Prasioi and Gangaridi', where he proposed that the fourth century Greek historians' "Prasioi, Prasii or Proesidas or Praxiakos . . . stand for Prāgjyotiṣa and not Prāćya. This kingdom then included the modern Assam Valley and the whole of Northern Bengal as far as the boundary of Mithilā or Videha." The larger Indological community, of course, did not take this identification seriously since the consensus was that Prasioi is Prāćya or Magadha, identified in turn with south Bihar.

> It may be considered *too late now* to dispute the correctness of a theory accepted by nearly the whole host of distinguished Indologists; but it should be observed that no theory is sacrosanct and that continual supercession is the law of research.[127]

While Bhattacharya could explain the Mahābhārata problem (i.e. Prāgjyotiṣa as a northern kingdom) by assuming that Prāgjyotiṣa was so large a kingdom that it extended from the east to the north of Indraprastha, he had to dismiss the Rāmāyaṇa anomaly (Sugrīva placed it in the west of Kiṣkindhyā) as simply saying that "the king of the monkeys must have lost his sense of direction", p. 2 of Introduction.

[126] Kanaklal Barua, 'Uttarkuladeśa', *Journal of Assam Research Society*, V: 4 (January, 1938), pp. 113-115.

The Assamese historian of the nineteen thirties rose to find that he would always arrive only too late in the feast of Indian tradition. While this belatedness was undeniably a function of Assam's spatial peripherality, taking a cue from Homi Bhabha it may be argued that for many of the Assamese historians the determined spatial extension of Kamarupa became a metaphor of straightening up the politics of hierarchized time within nation.[128] In their formulations, Assam was not a latecomer to, but one of the earliest members of, the Indian nation.

In 1928 the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies was set up to assume most of the responsibilities of the Directorate of Ethnography with the Cotton College professor Suryya Kumar Bhuyan as its Assistant Director. Even without reading too much into the fact that Assam was the only province in British India which possessed a distinct Government department specifically entrusted with "the pursuit of historical and antiquarian research", it can be safely stated that contestation and confusion over the pasts of the province reached a remarkable height by the early twentieth century and there was a serious attempt by the government to professionalize the historical inquiries. Volatility of popular imagination could not be, however, fully contained by the operative categories of historical discipline.[129] Colonial modernity not only invited the local

[127] Kanaklal Barua, 'Prasioi and Gangaridi', *Journal of Assam Research Society*, II: 2 (July, 1934), pp. 52-54 [emphasis added].

[128] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994)

[129] Partha Chatterjee 'History and the Domain of the Popular', *Seminar* 522 (February 2003) observes how during professionalization of the discipline,

middle classes to sign on its catechistic roll of producing tradition, but the increasing access to print and the unpretentious dependence of etymology on the aural also to some extent democratized the scope of local responses. Toponymy could hardly remain a specialist's domain. Many of the local educated, well versed in the village and district traditions and broadly acquainted with the identificatory methodology of Indology, began to publish articles, pamphlets and tracts on the subject. Since it is not possible to discuss all of these texts, I shall bring up here the case of a somewhat unusual and interesting treatise; the choice of course is not guided by a search for a 'representative' text (I fear there might be none) but is rather made to indicate the range of arguments that were being employed in these debates.

Nagendra Narayan Das, an Extra Assistant Commissioner in Assam, published a tract called *Sword of the East* in 1941 solely devoted to the topic. He began by disentangling, as he said, an "erroneous fusion". Quoting the *Bhāgavata*, he argued that 'Ceylon' and 'Lankā' were different places.[130] This was not something radically new. Lassen had already located Lankā in the Central Provinces, and even other identifications were not absent.[131] Therefore when Das argued that 'Singhal' and 'Prāgjyotiṣapura' were the same place, he was no doubt on a recognizable path within the Indological circuit. But the basis of his argument was fairly strange. Assam, he argued, was "the mid point from the two poles" and

many old 'cultural histories' were displaced from the academic plane, but continued to occupy the "popular domain".

[130] Nagendra Narayan Das, *Sword of the East* (Shillong: the author, 1941), p. 1.

[131] Robert P. Goldman (ed.), *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmikī: An Epic of Ancient India*, vol. I: Bālakāṇḍa, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), Introduction.

> Greenwich has only arbitrarily and with physical force been made the centre through which the zero line of longitude has been drawn to the utter neglect of the cardinally central point, Rome, the central point of the Mediterranean, the meridian region of the earth. The reference of this Rome is frequently met with in oriental Jyotish and other scriptures. The respective distances between Greenwich and Ceylon, and between Rome and Assam, rather more precisely, Prakjyotishpur [sic], are absolutely the same.[132]

The more intelligible line of argument followed etymological trajectories.

> The word 'sun' is known in Arabic language as Al Shams. The sun-letter shin being preceded by the letter 'lam', the 'la' is not pronounced; and so the proper pronounciation is 'Ashams', and the last 'm' being without any vowel, the last 's' often remains unpronounced; and hence the word 'Asham' or the Sun, or more precisely, the land of the first sun on whose worship was born Rig Veda.[133]

And again,

> The word 'Shillong' representing the name

[132] Das, *Sword of the East*, p. 2.

[133] Das, *Sword of the East*, p. 8.

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> of the capital of the province of Assam is, with little or no phonetic diversion, the same word as Ceylon. The hillock named Gondhmoi or Gandhamadan situate[d] near village Sualkuchi in the district Kamrup, and the adjoining holy shrine named 'Lakshmaner Saktishel' and the mythological tradition associated with these places are subjects which deserve an inquisitive and searching enquiry and scientific researches.

Das regretted that no one had "gone deep into the science of nomenclature of the famous places like Rampur, Ramgaon, Ramgarh, Ramartila, Ramcharani, Ramchahila, Ramdia, etc. Is it merely an indication of devotion towards Lord Rama or a manifestation of some historic truth?"[134] According to him the truth was – as the unusually bold letters in the first page of the tract screamed – "Assam is Ceylon". Cherapunji was derived from Ćeḍī ("a female Rakhasa"); Nagas were of course the Nāgās; the two rivers Meghna and Surma in Assam were respectively styled after the names of Meghnād and Saramā, noted members of Rāvaṇa's family; the reference to gold in the name of Svarṇalankā was retained in the name of Suban-siri. This was precisely the landscape where the epic battle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa was fought. Chronicles had failed to record, memories had faded away, but the place names remained as immovable cursors to that otherwise inaccessible history. So did the 'tribes', by refusing to change with time:

> It is an admitted tradition that the three

[134] Das, *Sword of the East*, p. 3.

> main primitive aboriginal tribes of Ceylon are: – (1) Yahkas [sic] (2) Rakhas, or Rakhasas [sic] (3) Nagas ... The descendents of those meat-eating savage Rakhasas are still to be seen with their tribal characteristics in their own country – own home – own caves and peaks, jungles and in slopes. ... They are the glorious relics of Assam, namely, the Hill Tribes... Even through this impregnable darkness of the past, the only illuminating factor is [sic] these Hill Tribes, acting as the Pole Star.[135]

The traffic of proper names was clearly cut across by the conflictual politics of fashioning a new selfhood. Reading Michel Foucault in this precise context, I argue that the colonially carried modernity in forcing "the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages" was ceaselessly producing the province of Assam to its new educated middle class as a heterotopia.[136] Christened either Kāmarūpa or Prāgjyotiṣa or Kadalirājya or Stri-rājya,[137] the textual territories had the function "to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled." The humility and disgrace of a belated colonial

[135] Das, *Sword of the East*, pp. 3-4.

[136] Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces' (1967), trans. Jay Miskowiec, <http://foucault.info/documents/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>

[137] I have discussed the story of identifying these two mythic kingdoms with Assam in my 'Kāmākhyā's Sheep: Space, Sexuality and the Colonial Career of a Stereotype' (forthcoming)

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appearance energized "the project of organizing . . . a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place." [138]

Conclusions

I am tempted to recap a few points. First, toponymic identification was neither a disentangled nor a disinterested practice which concerned only a few experts. For the colonialists "naming words were forms of spatial punctuation, transforming space into an object of knowledge, something that could be explored and read."[139] The practice was crucially positioned within a larger discourse about employing knowledge of the past in the colonial society. Within the provisos of this discourse the space of British India was generally naturalized as a recuperation of the purāṇic pale. This also proved to be a major though unstable axis of collaboration between the imperial and the nationalist scholarships. But many of the local intellectuals of Assam were unhappy with various established Indological formulations that continued to treat the frontier province as a belated appendix to the great Indian tradition. The usual response from the local intellectuals was to employ the same methods on the same texts to produce absolutely opposite conclusions. This was possible mostly because of flexible and liberal use of etymological principles. The failure of history to completely displace Indology, its own colonial proxy, from the ground of popular imaginations energized the production of this new hybrid knowledge of the pasts.

[138] Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces'.

[139] Paul Carter, *Road to Botany Bay*, p. 229.

Second, this paper has not been so much interested in the question whether a particular identification (or the broadly-agreed identification of Kāmarūpa and Prāgjyotiṣapura with Assam) was true or false as in the question what all was involved in the process of producing such truths. Of course there is no getting away from the fact that had been a set of local traditions, presumably reinforced by the eighteenth century Brahmanization drive of the Ahom king Rudra Singha,[140] which claimed the Kāmarūpa-Prāgjyotiṣapura attributions. But incompatibilities and heterogeneities began to form the central problematic of discourse about local pasts only after these traditions had to be fitted into the procrustean bed of the imperial/national identity.[141] A comparativist approach, which was biased in advance against the authenticity of the belated local vis-ą-vis that of the already national, mobilized a whole new cultural repertoire that demanded an equal place for Assam

[140] See Appendix A in Suryya Kumar Bhuyan (ed.), *Kamarupar Buranji or An Account of the Ancient Kamarupa; and A History of the Mogul Conflicts with Assam and Cooch Behar, up to AD 1682 with Appendices* (Gauhati: Directorate of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, 1930). However, as the politics of treating the *Buranjis* as pristine primary sources for the precolonial period has recently been opened up to informed interrogation [See, e.g., Sayeeda Yasmin Saikia, *A Name without a People: Searching Tai-Ahom in Modern India* (Ph. D. Dissertation in History: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1999)], Bhuyan's materials demand a rereading. For a comparative perspective, see James W. Millward, '"Coming onto the Map": "Western Regions" Geography and Cartographic Nomenclature in the Making of Chinese Empire in Xinjiang', *Late Imperial China*, 20:2 (1999), pp. 61-98. Millward has shown how the eighteenth-century Qing drive towards a toponymic inventory involved both Jesuit participation in Surveys and reinvention of the Han tradition.

[141] How intensely the toponymic debates were caught in the naturalization of the Indian space can be gauged from the following incident. When a Krishna Kumar classed Bhaskaravarmaṇa along with the "traitors"... "for he assisted the Chinese envoy Wang-Hiuen-Tse when the latter was attacked

within the colony. The terms of the interrogation to which the Indologists and historians submitted the texts and the traditions made it quite clear that the presumed audience was not the village community from whom the traditions were collected but rather the educated middle class Assamese who began to compete for careers in the all-India level. This paper has tried to show that the nationalization of local traditions had to proceed through a complex and contestatory process of selection. We have already noted that Nundo Lal Dey's 1899 *Geographical Dictionary* identified three alternative locations for the Kāmākhyā pīṭha, but over the years only the temple in Guwahati has come to be recognized as *the* pīṭha.[142] On the other hand, in spite of a living pilgrimage tradition that Kuśīnagara, the spot where the Buddha attained *mahāparinirvāṇa*, was somewhere near Hājo in Assam, Cunnngham's identification of the place in fifty-five kilometers away from Gorakhpur still reigns the academic and tourist imaginations.

Third, this paper has not discussed the texts which were ordered as the 'Tantras' in the colonial register and sidestepped the problematic of purposeful multivalence of the word kāmarūpa in the esoteric texts as encountered by translations and literal reading.[143] And still, its immanent economy, I hope,

and insulted by Arjunāśa who had usurped the throne of Kanauj after the death of Harṣa", Kanaklal Barua vigorously defended the charge saying Bhaskaravarmana had never been "internationalist-minded" and was acting only according to the norms of Hindu hospitality. See Krishna Kumar, 'A Case of the Downfall of Ancient India', *Indian Historical Quarterly*, XIII: 4 (1937) and K. L. Barua, 'An Unjust Accusation', *Journal of Assam Research Society*, V: 4 (January 1938), pp. 118-121

[142] Law, *Historical Geography of Ancient India*, p. 228

[143] I discuss them in 'Kāmākhyā's Sheep: Space, Sexuality and the Colonial Career of a Stereotype' (forthcoming). It might be noted that even certain

suggests the nature of the ideological investments in the various toponymic practices in colonial Assam. By this phrase we do not mean that the practices were simply illusory, but rather try to carry the Althusserian sense that "there is no practice except by and in an ideology."[144] Even James Rennell's identification of ancient Pataliputra with modern Patna, almost the founding moment of the 'scientific' mapping of historical geography of India, could not have been possible without these investments.[145] At stake was not so much a mythic kingdom of forgotten ages, but rather the lived experiences of a colonial

non-Tantra Sanskrit texts, such as the twelfth century Rāmaćaritam of Sandhyākaranandin, played with this equivalence: See III. P. 47 and IV. P. 5 in *Rāmaćaritam of Sandhyākaranandin*, edited by Haraprasad Sastri (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1910).

[144] Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 127-186.

[145] "Considering the general significance of this identification it might be useful to examine how this was arrived at. D'Anville put ancient Palibothra at modern Allahabad at the confluence of the Ganges and the Yamuna because the place was supposed to be situated at the confluence of the Ganges with a very large river. Rennell calculated the distance given in Pliny from Taxila to various places in Punjab and the Gangetic valley including Palibothra. According to Pliny it was 425 Roman miles to Pataliputra or Palibothra from the confluence of the Ganges with the Yamuna and the mouth of the Ganges was 638 Roman miles below that. Rennell calculated that a Roman mile was [0].57 geographical mile in a straight line or about [0].70 'by the windings of the road.' By calculating the distance given in Pliny in this fashion he thought that by this account Palibothra should be 'nearly about the town of Bar, 40 miles below Patna'. This was something he found very difficult to accept: 'We can hardly doubt after this account of Pliny's, but that some very large city stood nearly in the position which he assigns to Palibothra; but that this city was the capital of India, and the place visited by the Grecian ambassador, I do by no means suppose. I rather incline to think that the city meant by Pliny, stood on the site of Patna; . . .'" Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *A History of Indian Archaeology: From the Beginning to 1947* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1988), pp. 16-17. James Rennel, *Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan; or the Mogul empire. With an*

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margin. Kāmarūpa, Prāgjyotiṣapura and other scripted countries became "a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted"[146]

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introduction, illustrative of the geography and present division of that country. And a map of the countries situated between the heads of the Indian rivers, and the Caspian Sea. Also a supplementary map, containing the improved geography of the countries contiguous to the heads of the Indus (The third edition. London, W. Bulmer & Co, 1793)

[146] Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces'.

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