Genealogy of Place and Articulation of Political Identity
A study of the Emergence of Tripura as Homeland

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By

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation, *Genealogy of Place and Articulation of Political Identity: A Study of the Emergence of Tripura as Homeland*, carried out by me under the supervision of Dr. Prakash C. Sarangi, Department of Political Science, University of Hyderabad, is an original work of mine. This dissertation or any part there of has not been submitted for any other degree at this university and any where else.

Hyderabad
Date

Ram Kumar Debbarma

DEDICATED TO
MY PARENTS, MY BROTHER, MY SISTER
WITHOUT YOUR SACRIFICES THIS WORK WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE.

Contents

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List of Maps

Chapter I

Identity and Place: An Introduction to the Study

Each new form of state, each new form of political power, introduces its own particular way of partitioning spaceé ..its own discourse about space and about things and people in space. Each such form command space to serve its purpose.[1]

The narration of óplaceô as a homeland, based on certain idea of continuity, is historically contingent and possible only within a disjuncted space. Homeland is not a given territoriality and identities do not inhabit a continuous space that can be called homeland. This is because the connection between an identity and a marked place is not natural ï that connection is produced through disjunction in space. This disjunction in space is what this study is about: that is, what difference does it make to think of identity as constituted by disjunction in space? The ways identity groups conceptualise space have enormous consequences for identity politics. It is that space I attempt to critically analyse. This study aspires to tease out a radically different reading of geography of place, Tripura, and its production as a specific space by modern identity politics.

In many ways, this is not a new question to ask of identity politics. Thongchai Winichakulôs óintriguingô analysis of emergence of a new territorial entity ónationô by examining the influence of cartography posits disjunction in space.[2] His analysis, though the scale is nation, carry significant implications for understanding any form of territorial identity. For example, in present day northeast India, the British-India colonial power named óplacesô, mapped them and fixed communities inside

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[1] Henri Lefebvre.1991.*The Production of Space*, Blackwell:CambridgeUSA/Oxford UK, p. 81(Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith).

[2] Thongchai Winichakul.1994. *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-body of a Nation*, Silkworm Books: Chiang Mai.

geographical grids. Colonial cartography not only mapped these modern places within British-India imperial space, but these mapped places also entailed production of rival geographies in the postcolonial period. In order to attend to the rival geographies, one must inevitably recognise the ambivalence of place and paradoxical effects of cartography (elaborated in literature review section). The objective then is to carry out a genealogy of place ï marked by disjunctions ï so as to make sense of the possibilities of rival geographies.[3]

Taking Tripura, a state in the northeast India, as a case, this study traces the tortuous path space has been subjected in its emergence as modern contested place. This study then is about the emergence of Tripura as a specific space, a homeland, in the postcolonial period. It is about the making of rival geographical imaginations of Tripura: how identity groups narrate it as their ôhomelandõ? More specifically, how the space called ôhomelandõ is produced?

The dissolution of British-India in 1947 ï and subsequent disruption of former ruling house of Tripura ï had brought into play three dominant mutually exclusive conceptions of ôTripuraõ as a homeland.[4] The postcolonial place became a site where old ideas of ôTripuraõ required erasure in order to inscribe a new conception of place.[5] The years that preceded the accession to Indian Union (August 1949) were

[3] The use of the term ôgenealogyõ should not be interpreted as an attempt at Foucauldian analysis. I merely use the term to convey the spirit behind it, that is, an attempt at understanding the history of the present.

[4] These three ideas of Tripura as homeland were: ôTripuraõ as part of the severed Muslim-space of Bengal; ôTripuraõ as ônatural homeõ of Bengalee-Hindus, a place within Hindu cosmography; and Tripura as home-space of Tripuris and other hill communities. In the Tripura state classificatory grid, the term ôTripuriõ is used to identify only the community which use the modern surname ôDebbarmaõ. It excludes other Kokborok speaking tribes (Reang, Jamatia, Koloi, Uchoi, Tripura etc.) and other hill communities. This study will use the term to include all the hill communities in Tripura.

[5] My categorisation of Tripura as a ôpostcolonialõ goes against conventional history of Tripura: Tripura was never colonised by the British. This study will show that Tripura was never outside the British-India imperial space, or outside colonial space.

particularly violent: wholesale extrusion of Bengalee-Muslims and subsequently, silencing of Tripuri ethno-nationalist ideologies. Tripura acquired new identity: a place within India, home of ótribals and non tribalsô. A ónew ways of seeingô Tripura: new discourse of space, things and people.

But this new space is produced only in simultaneous reproduction of past: reconstruction of history of place on which modern identity groups retrofits their homeland. This raises questions not only about reproduction of history, but also about the ways in which past geography is imagined. óHomelandô after all is a spatial ideology par excellence. It is an imagined space or to use Edward Saidôs term, an óimaginative geographyô.[6] This work emphasises the role of history and geography ï rather discourse of history and geography ï in the creation of a place as homeland. The question then becomes why certain groups imagine the geography of a place in a particular way? Why Tripuri ethno-nationalists imagined Tripuraôs history and geography differently from Bengalee-Hindus or Bengalee-Muslims? What explains the existence of rival histories and geographies?

The subject of this study is space, place and identity. Study of identity politics in the northeast region (India) invariably ends up as a cumulative, linear (straight story telling) narration of ótribalô resistance to British colonialism, movement for secession, regionalism, autonomy and statehood. This study is neither a study of state making

[6] Derek Grogory writes, Saidôs call for critical reading of what he called óimaginative geographiesô in Orientalism has to do with the ñfiguration of place, space and landscape that dramatize distance and difference in such a way that óourô space is divided and demarcated from ótheirô space. For Said, imaginative geographies are discursive formations, tense constellation of power, knowledge and spatiality, that are centred on óhereô and projected towards óthereô so that the óvacant or the anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us hereò see Derek Gregory.1994. ñBetween the book and the lamp: Imaginative geographies of Egypt, 1849-50ò, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, Vol. 20, No. 1 pp.29-57 (quoted from p.29); See Edward Said.1979. *Orientalism*, Routledge and Kegan Paul: London and Henley, pp.54-55.

process or state formation, nor is this study merely about the making of modern identities in Tripura. This study is about producing ôTripuraö ï how the notion of this particular place was constructed and how this place is contested by other geographical imaginations?

I admit that the ideas, theories, concepts and approach used or taken in this study are not original. I have elaborately borrowed from numerous scholars who have applied the notion of space and place to the study of modern identities. Similarly, following their foot steps, I have gained from thinkers of space responsible for the ôspatial turnö or the ôcritical re-assertion of space in social scienceö.[7] All I have done is to take these ideas, theories and concepts and see how a postcolonial place (in this case Tripura) can be re-conceptualised as a way to pose challenge to the prevailing notions of it. When modernity has been characterised by violent ethnic conflict, armed movements, and violent political struggles, prevailing epistemologies of this place needs to be challenged. The purpose, then, is to insert, in the scholarship on Northeast India, a new way of imagining place/identity.

ôTripuraö as place/Identity: The Subject of Study

Tripura, today, is bounded geographically marked space inhabited by two major ethnic groups: Tripuris and Bengalee-Hindus. Since 1960s, these two groups have been engaged in conflicts which expressed in its bloodiest form during the 1980s and then during 1999-2002. Tripuri ethno-nationalists narrate Bengalee-Hindus as ôoutsiderö, as ôillegal immigrantsö. Various Tripuri armed groups ï since 1960s ï

[7] Edward Soja.1994. *Postmodern Geographies: The Re-assertion of Space in the Critical Social Theory*, Verso: London/New York.

demanded complete expulsion of the órefugee Bengalisô. Some of these organisations refused to recognize the postcolonial state, which according to them is a ócolonial governmentô.

The geography of Tripura is imagined as inhabiting a continuous space since antiquity: unchanging, immutable place, a homeland of Tripuris. In their narration, Tripuri nation, ruled by numerous great kings, has always been an identifiable place. In fact, the power of the Tripuris is believed have extended upto Khashi Hills in the North, Manipur Hills in the Northeast, Arakan hills of Burma in the east, the bay of Bengal to the south, and the Brahmaputra river to the west.[8] I will articulate a different way of looking at precolonial spatial realities. It would suffice for now to point out the problem in the narration of such simplistic geography: within that geography how do we mark óTripuriô and óinfiltratorô and how do we imagine the Bengalee-Hindu and Bengalee-Muslim as occupying different spatiality?

The state sanctioned history also constructs a similar geography of Tripura. However, that geography is narrated as ñoriginal land of the tribals (Tripuris)é is also the house of non-tribals and people of different religious faiths.ò[9] Place Tripura is imagined as always a space within Bengal and a sacred landscape within Indic cosmography. In fact one Bengalee writer delves into the mythic past ï Tripuri kings had ócontrolled

[8] Chandramani Debbarma.2006. *The Glory of Tripura Civilization*: *History of Tripura with Kok Borok Names of the Kings*, Parul Prakashani: Agartalta; *The Boroks of Twipra*ô and *A Brief History and Present Condition of the Boroks of Twipra,* (Handbooks published by The Information and Pubicity Wing of Borok Peoples Human Right Organisation, both the handbooks are undated); Speech of Bijoy Kumar Hrankhal, President of Indigenous Nationalist Party of Twipra, at the United Nations Working Group of Indigenous Population, Geneva, July 2006.

[9] J D Mandal.undated. *The Agony of Tripura* <htt://www.oocities.org/the_agony_of_tripura> (accessed 7 June 2011).

parts of Eastern Bengalô, and Tripuri rulers óbathing in several rivers of Bengalôï to naturalise modern geographical connections.[10]

These two narratives of Tripura present us with two divergent discourses of homeland. In both the discourses, history and geography of Tripura constitute two important tools of identity marker and differentiation. The two modes of narration proceed from a given premise that Tripura inhabits a continuous space and history, which makes possible for a linear, accretive discourse of identity and place. The premise of continuous history and space forms the starting point from where to conceptualise homeland, indigenous, original, other, which are by and large modern political phenomena.

On this understanding ótripuraô occupies unchanging historical space since antiquity. Tripura as always already identifiable, bounded, fixed place which allow ready conceptualisation of expansion, contraction of territory and, entry and extrusion of communities.[11] Within this narrative of place, two political ideologies can be mapped: Tripuri ethno-nationalistôs idea of Tripura as always a place of Tripuris and other hill/indigenous communities; and Bengalee-Hinduôs idea of Tripura as a home of ótribal and non tribalô. This study would treat the latter as state-sponsored or state-sanctioned idea of Tripura.[12]

[10] See Subhir Bhaumik.2002. ñDisaster in Tripuraò in *India-Seminar* <http://www.india-seminar/2002/510/510%20subir%20bhaumik.htm> (accessed 7 June 2011).
[11] The list is long. A few of them are Kamalini Ghosh.1984.*Tribal Insurrection in Tripura*, Book Link Corporation: Hyderabad; Jagadish Gan-Chaudhuri.2004. *A Constitutional History of Tripura*, Parul Prakashani:Kolkata and Agartala; Chandramani Debbarma, *Glory of Tripura Civilization: History of Tripura with Kak Barak Names of Kings*, op. cit.
[12] To say that only the Bengalee-Hinduôs idea of home is sanctioned by the state is a bias interpretation. My reason for doing so stems from the fact that since 1949 Tripura state has outlawed Bengalee-Muslims and Tripuri ethno-nationalists idea of Tripura. This subject will be elaborated in chapter four.

These fundamentally flawed spatial ideologies can be implicated in the framing of violent political confrontation in modern Tripura in particular, and the entire region in general. This spatial ideology makes possible retrofitting of radically different modern places onto premodern geographical realities, and thereby construct a history of migration or ‘entry’ of various communities carrying their already produced portable identities with them. The passages below encapsulate this problem – place-names ‘Tripura’ and ‘Mizoram’ are imagined to be geographical realities even prior to appropriation and production of that space. This way of imagining and narrating place/identity, is not only implicit in closure, but also posits their ‘givenness’.[13]

> The political history of the Riangs had been always chequered and eventful and related to that of neighbouring tribes particularly to the Tipras and the Mogs. The Tipras were once powerful in Brahmaputra valley of Assam. Owing to *inter-tribal conflict* they left Assam, moved south ward and through Cachar-Karimganj-Sylhet *entered*, in course of time, into *Tripura*. That was probably in the 8th -9th centuries. Similarly, the Riangs were once powerful in the hill tracts of Chittagong. Being defeated by the Mogs, they migrated north-west ward and *entered into Tripura* probably by the 9th-10th centuries (all emphasis are mine).[14]

> In the beginning, they (the Riangs) were not well treated by the then Tripura Raja and most of them were forced to flee to deep forests, not only in the hill areas of Tripura, but also in the adjoining areas of *Mizoram*.[15]

Modern states divide hill communities into ‘tribes’, and once this classification obtains official sanction, the ‘tribes’ are imagined as entering an eternally fixed

[13] This way of imagining place is responsible for conflict, violence and territorial parochialism. Doreen Massey, in much of her work, emphasised the ‘openness’ of place and identity, for example see *For Space*, Sage: London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, 2005, pp.4-9.
[14] Jagadish Gan-Chudhuri.1983.*The Riangs of Tripura*, Directorate of Research, Department of Welfare for Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes, Government of Tripura, p.81.
[15] *A Brief Account of Riangs in Mizoram,* Tribal Research Institute, Department of Education, Mizoram, Aizawl, pp.84-85 (1986).

geographical entity from some place. But this disaggregation is not without problem. Nor is the imagination of ôTripuraô as inhabiting continuous space. In the premodern spatial arrangement, where place ôTipperahô constituted ómobileô, borderless and even disappearance, how do we conceptualise entry? Modern ethno-nationalist in the region, retrofit these modern geographical grids onto premodern spatial frames making possible for imagining óentryô and thereby produce the ótherô.

The problem with classification of hill communities into ótribesô is this: It makes identities as given. This ógivennessô of identity becomes the framework from which to proceed defining, appropriating, controlling and locating at the lower end of spatial-temporal graph. None of these identities enumerated by modern state constitute meaningful reference, say prior to colonisation. The identity ôTripuriô is fraught with contestation, so much so that, ethno-nationalist groups constructed a new identity ôBorokô to include entire kokborok or kaubru speaking population of the state.[16]

This unproblematised conception of place and identity impinges on the way the region has been studied. It makes straight story telling possible. Inevitably, every narrative of the region follows this paradigm: entry (from some place) - encounter (with other ótribesô and later British) ï colonisation - struggle (against Indian Nation-State) - state formation. Place therefore, is conceptualising as something ógivenô; its relationship to the identity is natural.

In a recent study of Naga identity formation, Yhome tried to offer a new perspective of place. He argued that, place-making in the region, ó in the colonial context, mapping

[16] During the late 1990s numerous groups appeared who used word ôBorokô instead of ôTripuriô. Some of them are, Borok Peoplesô Human Right Organisation, Borok Women Forum, Borok Mothersô Association. Kokborok is the language spoken by various Tripuri communities.

of spaces into places constructed many place identity in the region. For example, places such as Assam, Cachar, Manipur, Burma, Tripura, Bhutan and Tibet were all constructed through the colonial spatial imagination in the last two centuries. These places with distinct place names and boundaries did not exist prior to colonial mapping. Rather, there were many kingdoms and independent communities inhabiting these areas without clear demarcation of boundaries between them. Gradually colonial mapping of spaces constructed these place identities by naming them in the colonial map and gradually by demarcating specific boundaries.ò[17]

Imagined this way, modern spatial arrangement is inevitably and inherently articulated as contested, from without and within. My only problem with his formulation is this: he did not distinguish place formation in the hills and in the valleys. The geographical conditions and the historical context of the mapping of place identities of formerly premodern states like Tripura or Manipur or Assam were very dissimilar to the modern places like Nagaland and Mizoram. These precolonial states were characterized by existence of already identifiable political centre, whereas the hills constituted classic *Zomia* space.[18] To talk of mapping of Tripura and mapping of Mizoram or Nagaland as similar would mistake the nature of space in the two cases. Tripura was already an identifiable place ï a named-place in the colonial map, albeit an open place.

[17] Kekhriesituo Yhome.2006. *Making of Modern Naga Identity: The Historical and Geographical Dimension,* PhD Thesis, Department of History, University of Hyderabad (unpublished), pp.101, 135.
[18] The term *Zomia* has been used by James C Scott (originally coined by Willem Van Schendel) to describe a political space or geography illegible to state-making. Zomia may also be conceptualised as a space or zone of refuge for state escaping communities. The obverse effect of state-making is the theme of his recent much acclaimed book. See James C Scott. 2009. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of the Upland South East Asia,* Yale University Press: New Haven and London, pp.1-39.

This study conceptualises precolonial Tipperah[19] (elaborated in chapter two) as a moving place ï an identifiable stable political centre (not necessarily stable dynasty) without an identifiable, fixed geography, constantly shifting would-be state. One can visualise the impediments confronting would-be state-making people inhabiting an inhospitable geography or what Scott calls ófriction of terrainô, designed to thwart such attempt.[20] I have in mind what Scott calls óstate-preventingô and óstate-repellingô characteristics.[21] This would explain the numerous ruins attributed to ôTipperasô, scattered around valleys, river banks and foothills on the present borderlands with Bangladesh. Tripuri ethno-nationalists and Bengalee historians (of Tripura) would summon and use the extant óruinsô to project a mighty, expansive and a glorious past. These extant óruinsô can also be read against it, as proofs of state-failure, rather than successful state-making.

Precolonial Tipperah therefore constituted an identifiable place, albeit moving, open and a non-geographical bloc. Colonial enterprise disjuncted that indigenous spatial frames and established a territoriality legible to imperial ideology. However, discourse of Tripura as contested home-space ï a distinct epistemology of place ï appeared only after the dissolution of British-India. Therefore, the idea of Tripura as ôhomeô of a specific community or particular idea of ópeopleô is not given. The

[19] I will use the spelling ôTipperahô to refer to the precolonial and colonial Tripura. The spelling ôTïpperaô refers to the hill communities who are subject of Tipperah state. The identity ôTïpperaô will be conceptualized in chapter II.
[20] The term ófriction of terrainô is used by James C Scott to refer to the difficulties imposed by geography on the state-making enterprise in premodern societies, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, pp. xi and 40-63.
[21] According to Scott, these two are órelated but not identical. State-repelling traits are those that make it difficult for a state to capture or incorporate and rule it, or to systematically appropriate its material production. State-preventing traits, on the other hand, are those that make it unlikely that a group will develop internally durable, hierarchical, state-like structuresô. For a list of example of these traits see *The Art of Not Being Governed*, pp.278-9.

connection between that idea of ópeopleô and the physical geography needs to be produced. The question then is: how is that óconnectionô produced?

Situating the study: The questions of space

Foucaultôs opening paragraph in his seminal essay, ñOf Other Spacesò, locates the shift or the emergence of space as important analytical concept in our understanding of social realities.

> The great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, historyé . The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at the moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. One can perhaps say that certain ideological conflicts animating present-day polemics opposes the pious descendants of time and the determined inhabitants of space. [22]

He further asserts that óthis epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relation among sitesô. The problem of site ós not simply that of knowing whether there will be enough space for man in the worldé but also of knowing what relations of propinquity, what type of storage, circulation, marking and classification of human elements would be adopted in a given situation in order to achieve given end. The anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space, no doubt a great deal more than with time. ò[23]

[22] Michel Foucault.1967. ñOf Other Spacesò, in *Heterotopia,* <http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html1#top>
[23] Ibid.

Foucault found the ‘obsession’ with time deeply problematic, and one that has been responsible for the treatment of space as, ‘the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile’ and time as ‘richness, fecundity, life, dialectic.’[24] Like Foucault, Henri Lefebvre found treatment of space as ‘undialectical’ problematic. At the heart of Lefebvre’s project, in his path breaking work, *The Production of Space*, is to bring to the centre the inherent ‘spatiality’ of human lives, together with ‘historicality’ and ‘sociality’.[25] These two thinkers, particularly Lefebvre, have been responsible for the spatial turn in social sciences, and in the words of Soja, ‘opening up and exploring the limitless dimensions of our social spatiality’.[26]

Space is not merely a ‘container’ where events unfold in time. Space is not merely the physical surface of the earth, continuous and given. This view of space, according to Doreen Massey is an ‘unthought cosmology which carries with it social and political effects’.[27] Before inhabiting a space, it must be appropriated in order to be lived. As Lefebvre opines ‘each living body is space and has its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space.’[28] As the epigraph tellingly suggest: each new spatial formation must produce its own space, new discourse of people, things and space.

[24] Michel Foucault.1980. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interview and Other Writings 1972-1977*, Pantheon Books: New York (Edited by Colin Gordon) p.70.
[25] Edward Soja.1996. *Third Space: Journey to Los Angeles and Other Real and Imagined Places*, Blackwell: Cambridge USA/Oxford UK, p.2.
[26] Edward Soja, *Third Space*, p.6.
[27] Doreen Massey, *For Space*, p.4.
[28] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.170.

Space and place, like space and time, cannot be conceptualised separately. If space is the flow, place is the pause.[29] The act of appropriating space through naming, partitioning etcé produces place. Place indicates appropriation of space for certain use. Therefore, place is not pre-ideological site. Place also acquires meaning only in relation or opposition to other place. As Ingold puts it, ñlife on the spot surely cannot yield an experience of place, of being somewhere. To be a place, every somewhere must lie on one or several paths of movement to and from places elsewhere.ò[30] Imagining a closed and individual place becomes possible only in relation or opposition to similar places. Place is, therefore, an attempt to capture space and produce a site in place of extension or flow.[31] Naming, mapping and fixing of people into colonially constructed places in the present day northeast India region was predicated on the ideology of replacing the mobile spaces with sites of colonial controlled spaces.

Place therefore is a social construct. It is ówhere one is known and knows othersô.[32] Construction of place is always political. As Lefebvre argued, there is politics of space because space is political, and Foucault asserted that ó(a) critique could be carried out of this devaluation of space that has prevailed for generationsé . For those who confuse history with the old schemes of evolution, living continuity, organic development, progress of consciousness or the project of existence, the use of spatial terms seems to have the air of an anti-historyé é they did not understand that to trace

[29] This distinction has been elaborated by Yi-Fu Tuan. He writes, ówspace allows movement, place is a pause, each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into placesô. Yi-Fu Tuan.1977. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience,* Edward Arnold (pub) Ltd: London, p. 6
[30] Tim Ingold. 2007. *Lines. A Brief History*, Routledge:London and New York, pp.2-3.
[31] Foucault emphasised on how medieval spaces of emplacement was dislodged by the spaces of extension and which was substituted by localization or siting, see *Of other Spaces,* op.cit.
[32] David Butz and John Eyles.1997. ñReconceptualising the Sense of Place: Social Relation, Ideology and Ecologyò*, Geografiska Annaler*, Series B, Human Geography, Vol. 79, No. 1, pp. 1-25.

the forms of implantation, delimitation and demarcation of objects, the modes of tabulation, the organisation of domains meant the throwing into relief process ï historical ones, needless to say ï of powerô[33] Collective identities are not always based on commonness of language, culture and race; they are also constructed or produced through ideas about space and place.[34] The fabric (and the fabrication) is not only culture, but also geography and history.

The exclusive treatment of history, privileges time over space, when both space and time are basic categories of human existence.[35] This over emphasis on time was categorised by Soja as óspace-blinkered historicismô[36] Soja argued that óé . the spatiality of social life é .life-world of being creatively located, not only in the making of history, but also in the construction of human geographies, the social production of space and the restless formation and reformation of geographical landscapes; social beings actively emplaced in space and time in an explicitly historical and geographical contextualisationô[37] Therefore, this study recognises the importance of space and time in the construction of identity, as Foucault contended that, óspace is fundamental to any form of communal life; space is fundamental to any exercise of powerô[38]

Taken together, these insights suggest that space is socially produced. They opened up new ways of studying social realities. In the next section, I will present an outline of

[33] Michel Foucault. *Power/Knowledge*, p.70.
[34] See David Ludden.2002. *History Escapes the Nation: Regions and Localities in the World History of Southern Asia,* Paper presented to the South Asia Seminar at the University of Chicago <www.sas.upenn.edu/~ludden/chicago2.htm> (accessed October 2006).
[35] David Harvey.1990. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origin of Cultural Change,* Blackwell: Cambridge USA/Oxford UK, pp. 201-239.
[36] Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, p.11.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Quoted in Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, p.19.

the implications of these insights for the literature on place and identity, especially those which are relevant for this dissertation. I will then explain the departures taken in this study.

A Review of Literature

The importance of space and place in the construction of identity and difference has been explored by prominent thinkers on space.[39] The reference point among them is the shared-notion that place is a construct: the construction of place through the production of meaning and, embedded within this notion is the relation between identity and place. As David Harvey says,

> Place identity, in this collage of superimposed spatial images that implode upon us, becomes an important issue, because everyone occupies a space of individuation (a body, a room, a home, a shaping community, a nation), and how we individuate ourselves shapes identity.[40]

Harveyôs attention centres on the nature of óplaceô within the global capitalism ï the shifting collage world (control over space). Place-bound identity, in the form of personal or collective identity as a search for secure moorings in the shifting world, because they are disempowered (by universalising capitalism) from organising space. Thus óthe capacity of most social movements to command place better than space puts a strong emphasis upon the potential connection between place and social identity.ò[41]

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[39]Doreen Massey, *For Space,* op.cit ; Doreen Massey and Pat Jess .1995. *A Place in the World? Places, Cultures and Globalization*, The Open University: Oxford and New York; David Butz and John Eyles, *Reconceptualising Sense of Place: Social Relation, Ideology and Ecology*, op. cit; Fred R. Myers.2002. ñWays of Place-Makingò, in *La Ricerca Folklorica*, No. 45, Anthropologia delle sensazioni, pp.101-119.

[40] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity,* pp.302-6.

[41] Ibid.

Doreen Massey summarised Harveyôs idea this way: the growing mobility and internationalisation of these times make our old notion of places as settled, coherent communities more difficult to sustain but the very fact of heightened spatial mobility and the feeling ï which he sees as a product of it ï that we live in an increasingly unstable and uncertain world, also makes us need even more strongly of the notion of place as secure and stable.[42] Massey on the contrary, views place as opened and interdependent. The idea of places as óessentially open and porous as interlinkedô flows from Masseyôs refusal of collective identity as oppositional differentiation based on hard boundary. Place identities are ñalways already the product, in part, of long history, of connections with the beyond, with other places. They are always already hybrid places.ò[43]

Massey further argues that, physical boundaries that separate places (of nations and other territorial entity) do not embody eternal truth of places. These lines are drawn by society to serve particular purposes. Secondly, these physical boundaries ñinevitably cut across some of the other social relations which construct social places. The places they enclose are not pure. They gain, and have gained, their character by links with elsewhereô. Thirdly, boundaries are merely one of the ways of organising social space. Immense efforts are invested in constructing a sense of identity within the bordered place. They are part of the process of place-making.[44]

Unlike Harvey and Massey, Gilian Rose traces the connection, between place and notion of identity, through the concept of óa sense of placeô. The concept ï sense of

[42] Doreen Massey, ñThe Conceptualisation of Placeò, in Doreen Massey and Pat Jess, *A Place in the World?* op. cit, pp.45-86.
[43] Ibid, pp.66-67
[44] Ibid, pp.67-69

place ï in geography is used to indicate place as locus of personal feelings, infused with meanings.[45] The connection embodies three aspects: one, the sense of belonging which can be at the level of home, local, regional, nation etc..; two, relational, in relation to other place and other identities; and exclusive, contrasting or rejecting alien place.[46]

In a sense, then, there is always a connection between identity and place.[47] This study agrees that places should be conceptualised as always open, porous and interlinked. Both place and identity are socially produced. The question is: how do we explain the production of idea of absolute/closed places? The idea of Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Assam or Tripura, around which modern politics of identity is constructed, becomes possible through disjunction of premodern indigenous spaces (open, fluid and porous). The technologies of disjunction were colonial cartography and western geographical knowledge. These discursively constructed absolute/closed places (despite they being opened and interlined) are social realities that impinges the way identity politics is shaped. When did these colonially named-places become sites of modern identity? This study traces this history and locates the ópoliticalô in the production of this connection.

Further more, in these literatures, while both identity and place are conceptualised as socially constructed, the connection between the two is treated as unproblematic. The question, then, is: Is this connection given? How do we conceptualise place-bound

[45] Gilian Rose.1995. ñPlace and Identity: A Sense of Placeò, in Doreen Massey and Pat Jess, *A Place in the World?* p.88.
[46] Gilian Rose, *Place and Identity: A Sense of Place*, p. 89-97.
[47] For further reading on relationship between identity and place see, Fred R Myers.2002. *Ways of Place-Making,* op. cit. pp. 101-119; and also, Ana Maria Alonso.1994. The Politics of Space, Time and Substance: State Formation, Nationalism and Ethnicityò, *Annual Review of Anthropology,* Vol. 23, pp. 379-405

identity in the postcolonial places? The literatures reviewed below treat the relationship between identity and place as produced or constructed?

Satish Deshpande, in his study of the Indian nation, had argued that ñif the post-Anderson literature on the nation-form has concentrated on how nations are collectively imagined, the órеassertion of space in critical social theoryô has led us to realisation that even such a physical phenomenon as space is not ónaturalô but is *socially produced.* ò[48] His contention is that an identifiable territory is not a sufficient condition for the birth of a nation. ñNations takes shape ï they become socially visible ï only when an abstract ideological terrain and a concrete territory can be cross-mapped onto each other to produce a sense of nation-ness that large numbers of people share and believe in.ò

Deshpandeôs argument proceeds from the understanding that ñnation-as-space is simultaneously abstract (imagined, mental) and concrete (physical, geographical)ò, and that nation is imagined into existence when these contrary aspects are successfully linked. ñThis link is not pre-given, it must be painstakingly constructed.ò The technology of producing this ólinkô, he calls óspatial strategyô.[49] The implication of these insights for this study lies in the insistence that a territorial identity is imagined into existence only when an idea of it and the physical geography is cross-mapped onto each other. To give an example of this, he cites Benedict Andersonôs analysis of how map becomes a logo, a sign of nation, rather than as a ócompass to the

[48] Satish Deshpande.2003.*Contemporary India: A Sociological View,* Viking: India, pp. 74-75.

[49] His focus is on the spatial strategies of the ñHindutvaô (the right wing Hindu nationalist imagination of the Indian nation). He identifies three Hindutva spatial strategies which are based on sacred sites (places of essence), neighbourhood (our people, our area) and procession and pilgrimage (yatras), see the chapter on ñHindutva and its Spatial Strategiesò pp.74-97.

worldô.[50] Though Deshpandeôs study is at the scale of nation, it can be useful for study of identity at smaller scale, since the primary investigation being a territorial identity or a spatial ideology.

Another study which had a strong influence on the present study is Thongchai Winichakulôs book *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*. This brilliant study explores the emergence of a new territorial entity by examining the influence of modern mapping techniques on Thai conception of nationhood. The discourse of óThaiô as a nation becomes possible through new knowledge of geography and new technology of mapping. These new technology and knowledge were responsible for the disruption of premodern indigenous geography ï overlapping or multiple sovereignties ï and emergence of a mapped ógeo-bodyôof a nation.[51]

In a nutshell then, it is the technology of map which produced the nation, not the other way around. Thai nation was not prior to ñoperation of technology of territoriality which created nationhood spatially."[52] The nation then is an óeffect of modern geographical discourse whose prime technology is a map. ñThe knowledge about Siamese nationhood has been created by our conception of Siam-on-the-map,

[50] Deshpande writes ñ(i)n the construction of the nation as a special kind of imagined space, the historical (or more accurately óhistoricisedô) map is followed by what Benedict Anderson has called the ósecond avatarôof the map, the map-as-logo. Among the significant method which enabled the linking of a particular physical geography to a specific imagined community as its homeland, the logo map was given a major boost by new print technology which enabled its cheap mass productioin, allowing its function as ópure signô(or symbol) rather than ócompass to the worldôò Satish Deshpande, *Contemporary India*, p.76.

[51] He defines geo-body this way, ó(g)eographically speaking, the geo-body of the nation occupies a certain portion of the earthôs surface which is objectively identifiable. It appears to be concrete to the eyes as if its existence does not depend on any act of imagining. That of course, is not the case. The geo-body of a nation is merely effect of modern geographical discourse whose prime technology is mapô. Geo-body is ónot merely a space or territory. It is the component of the life of a nation. It is the source of pride, loyalty, love, passion, bias, hatred, reason, unreasonô. *Siam Mapped*, p.7

[52]Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped*, p.16.

emerging from maps and existing nowhere apart from the map.ò[53] The map as a special technology produces link between a territorial entity and a ówe-peopleô.

This way of understanding a territorial entity (even at geographical scale smaller than nation) has enormous implication for understanding identity politics in the northeast region in general and the present case study in particular. Much of the modern territorial entity in the region were/are product of colonial cartographic surgery. Colonial power mapped and produced places and fixed communities within these geographical grids. These spatial grids allowed operation of colonial power as legible geographies. In the postcolonial period, these places were summoned in the construction of modern ethnic identities. Therefore modern identity politics in the region cannot be understood unless one addresses this history ï the mapping of places. This history will also enable a critique of the link produced between modern identity and place.

Both Deshpande and (especially) Winichakulôs analysis of the production of link between identity and place/nation have enormous implication for this study. There are however a few differences between their analysis and this study. These two studies, particularly Winichakulôs, do not recognise the ambivalence of cartography in the narration of nation. Cartography can also be used against the narration of particular nation or in the words of Mathew Sparke, ñthe paradoxical capacity of such cartography to function variously for and against the exercise of modern state power.ò[54] Sparkeôs contention is that scholars (like Benedict Anderson) emphasised

[53] Ibid, p.17.
[54] Mathew Sparke.1998. ñA Map that Roared and an Original Atlas: Canada, Cartography, and the Narration of Nationò, *Annals of Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 88, No. 3, pp.463-495 (quoted from p.464).

on the ñgeneral *hegemonic* effect of national mapping, they have rarely addressed the *counterhegemonic* effect of cartographic negotiation.ò[55] This study investigates the production of both the hegemonic and counter hegemonic ideas of a mapped place. In the narration of modern Tripura as a homeland, modern identity groups not only use the colonial maps, but also summon other geographies and spaces in the production of the link. These other geographies and spaces, investigated here, are sacred sites, toponymies and places of memory.

For the study of sacred sites, I am indebted to Satish Deshpandeôs analysis of, what he calls, *places of essence*. His concern underlies how certain sacred places (e.g. birth place of Ram) are used in the imagination of Hindutva or the narration of Indian nation by right wing Neo-Hindu nationalist. These sacred places are sacred to a particular religion, and therefore religious sites. The sacred places in my study are ethnicised sites. No doubt some of the sacred places owe their origin to Indian sacred cosmography, but these places gain sacredness only in relation to production of homeland by an ethnic group. I argue that a place invested as sacred by ethnic group is an ethnicised site.

A Brief History of Mapping ôTripuraô

Discourse of identity is also discourse of history and geography. For construction of identity involves construction of history and place.[56] It must always lay claim to a past

[55] Ibid.
[56] For the relationship between construction of political identity and construction of history, see, Jonathan Friedman.1992. ñMyth, History and Politics of Identityò, *Cultural Anthropology,* Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 194-210 and; also Jonathan Friedman.1992. ñThe Past in the Future: History and the Politics of Identityò, *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 94, No. 4, (December) pp.837-859.

or reconstructed past in order to construct ówe selfô and the ótherô in the present.[57] Therefore history becomes a site for ideological investments and contestation. In Tripura two different modes of historiography exist: the state sponsored history and the Tripuri ethno-nationalist history. The former is the official history of Tripura, presented as the ócorrectô and ótrueô history, as provided in the chronicles of Manikya rulers; the later, contest much of the claims and conclusion made in the official history.[58] Central to the two modes of history is that the former presents the place as original home of both Bengalees and Tripuris and other smaller communities, while the latter treats Bengalees as óimmigrantsô and órefugeesô from Bangladesh. However, both agree to the fact that Tripura as a place have existed since time immemorial, the testimony of which is the list of 184 Tripuri kings who have ruled Tripura since ancient times.

This study tries to escape such simplistic view of history. óHomeô, óBengaleeô, óTripuriô, and órefugeeô are meaningful only within certain frame of understanding of place. Within the two modes of history lies practice of projecting modern frames onto ancient past. This study takes modern Tripura as a construct, a product of colonial cartography and spatial practice. One important objective of this study consists in challenging these two modes of history.

Tripuraôs modern boundaries are product of British-India colonial cartography. Imperial project required imposition of modern spaces. Present day northeast India in general, and Tripura in particular, was a mere óblank spaceô on the margins of the

[57] R G Suny.2001. ñConstructing Primordialism: Old Histories for New nationsò, *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 73, No. 4, pp. 862-896; Jonathan Friedman, *Myth, History and Politics of identity,* op. cit.

[58] Both the modes of history draw from *Rajmala* (the chronicle of Manikya dynasty), the writing of which began during the reign of Dharma Manikya in the mid 15th Century.

British-Indiaôs imperial map. The need for colonial annexation and exploitation required mapping the region. Mapping legitimates possession, exclusion, and control. In the early nineteenth century colonial cartographers began filling up these óblank spacesô in their imperial (project) map. What appeared then were colonial inscribed demarcated places like óGaro Hillsô, óJaintia Hillsô, óKhasi Hillsô, óLushai Hillsô etcé seeming to show the isomorphism between demarcated space and the cultural affinity of the people.[59] In the postcolonial period these colonial demarcated spaces became the basis for construction of exclusive modern identities.

Colonial demarcations of spaces are expression of imperial power towards imperial project of control exclusion and exploitation. The imperial cartography which displaced the indigenous lived and shared spaces in these formerly óblank spacesô served this particular project. For maps do not represent reality: they construct a reality. And they serve the power which benefits by that reality. Maps are not disinterested depiction of their spatial subjects but are partisan assertion about the nature of space, deployed to subject space to particular political interest.[60] The emergence of colonial demarcated spaces imposed the colonial powerôs representation of the óblank spacesô. Therefore what was displaced was the indigenous conception and practice of space.

Knowledge of cartography was unknown to the Tipperah rulers. The geography of its dominion and its frontier regions were unmapped, open spaces of mobility. The

[59] Garo, Khasi and Jaintia are three prominent communities in present day Meghalaya state. Each of these communities dominant the hills named after tribe names in Meghalaya, while simultaneously inhabiting places in Assam, Bangladesh and Tripura. The Lushai hill is presently known as Mizoram of State. In this study the terms óLushaiô, óKookieô and óKukiô will be used interchangeably.

[60] See J B Harley.2002. ñDeconstructing the Mapò, in Michael J Dear and Steven Flusty (eds*), The Spaces of Postmodernity: Reading in Human Geography*, Blackwel: University of Southern California, p.277-289.

failure to inscribe its political power over the geography of the region through technology of cartography, maps and other forms of text created enormous problems for the dynasty when confronted with the British over the ownership of the frontier regions.

Much of the frontier region of the present day Tripura and Bangladesh was an ambiguous margin between the Mughal rulers and Tipperah. When British-India took over the territories from the former Nawab of Bengal in 1761, it inherited a problematic region where notion of sovereignty, territoriality and boundary needed redefinition and imposition to legitimate its colonial rule. It is to be noted that the Muslims occupation could not or did not move beyond the plains into the hill tracts, perhaps for the reason that the hills were seen as non remunerative. Tipperah rulers paid tributes to the Nawab of Bengal for four compact blocks, known as Chakla Roshnabad: one in Sylhet District, two in the region termed by the British as Tipperah district and one in Noakhali district. These four blocks were seized by the Nawab of Bengal in 1620 from the Tipperah ruler and since then Tipperah had to pay Zamindary to the Nawab of Bengal. The British renamed it as Chakla Roshnabad Estate.[61] Unlike their Muslim predecessors, British were not satisfied with income generated form the small portion of plain land. It coveted the fertile valleys at the foot hills and the river valleys flowing from the hill, most importantly, control of tax over the remunerative trade in the foot hills. Consequently Manikya dynasty and British-India came into confrontation over control of rivers and fertile valleys and markets leading to boundary disputes for over a century.

[61] J G Cumming.1899. *Survey and Settlement of Chakla Roshnabad Estate in the District of Tipperah and Noakhali, 18892-1899*, (Reprinted by Tripura State Tribal Cultural Research Institute and Meuseum, Agartala), pp.76-82.

When British-India took over this frontier region, old boundary between the Mughals and Tipperah were slowly altered and a new boundary was imposed which defined the limits of control of now called ñHill Tipperahò by the British and óIndependent Tipperahô by Tipperah Rajah. The use of óIndependent Tipperahô and óBritish Tipperahô to separate the British held territories from Tipperah Rajahôs territory. Independent Tipperah referred to the óTipperah Hillô and British Tipperah referred to the óPlain Tipperahô. Initially Tipperah rulers did not agree to Britishôs request for a settled and marked boundary between the newly defined geographical entities. For the Tipperah rulers, more than geographical, social boundary between settled agrarian and moving communities of the hills was the fundamental distinction between its subjects and non subjects (elaborated in chapter two).

The geography of the frontier region between the present day Northeast and Bangladesh consisted of ambivalent margins. The Khasis held most land north of the Surma (river) and controlled mountains above; Jaintias controlled mountains and lowlands north and east of Sylhet town; Cacharis held the lower Barak (river) valley; and Tipperah Rajah controlled southern upland and the adjacent plains. In the low lands, the English increased taxation as much as they could, but the district remained poor revenue territory. By the beginning of 1780, a combined enterprise of British and Bengalee merchants and zamindars and farmers were pushing the Khasis and Jaintias farther into hills and occupying the plain regions.[62] The territory between Hill Tipperah and the British East Bengal also underwent significant transformation from 1800 A D. According to Cumming, Rennelôs Map of 1779, shows that the estate was

[62] David Ludden.2003. *Political Maps and Cultural Territories*, retrieved from <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~dludden/LuddenHIMALSylhet1.htm> (accessed Nov. 22, 2005).

coterminous with what was the original ôTipperah Districtô the under control of British-India. When the boundaries were altered parts of the then districts of Dacca and Mymensingh were included. The map made no distinction between the plains and hill Tipperah. However, the 1835 map of the region by Rushon show the estate to be entirely included within the then district of Tipperah, which extended widely on the east.[63] The separation of the estate from hill Tipperah on the east was effected by the map of 1835. In 1854 the boundary between Hill Tipperah and British Tipperah was demarcated. The division of former Tipperah Rajaôs territory into Hill Tipperah and British Tipperah was done on the basis of Lt. Fisherôs Line drawn on the ambiguous margin in 1819-21.

The Fisher line, drawn in 1921 to demarcate the boundary between British-India controlled territories known as ôBritish Tipperahô and ôIndependent Tipperahô, was the beginning of cartographic construction of modern Tripura. ôFisher Lineô which became the reference point, albeit contested, of later boundary disputes between Tipperah rulers and British-India, posited that ôIndependent Tipperahô merely consisted of the hills alone, now called as ôHill Tipperahô. A marked border on ambiguous and ambivalent frontier geography was resisted by various ówarlike, ósavageô tribes inhabiting this frontier region. Kookies or Lushais and other tribes who recognised neither the rule of the Tipperah Rajas nor the British-India raided British-India controlled territories. Tipperah rulers refused to control the raids as the state possessed neither the means control the Kookies nor did the Kookies acknowledge Tipperah rulers overlordship over them. After numerous expeditions against the Kookies, British-India drew another arbitrary boundary to separate Lushai hills and

[63] J G Cumming, op. cit.

Tipperah hills, and ordered the Tipperah raja to secure this particular boundary. The present day Tripura is colonial cartographic constructed place produced out of borderless space in an ambiguous frontier region of the British-India Empire.

Much of the modern boundaries of the northeast region of India were marked, in similar manner, during British-India colonialism. Place-names, such as, Khasi hills, Garo hills and Jaintia hills, Tipperah hills, Naga hills, Cachar hills, Lushai hills etcé were defined, inscribed and bounded by the colonial power. Colonialism, the possibility of exploitation is contingent upon production of an archive of knowledge about people and place. Geographical knowledge and the technology of mapping produced mapped places which makes possible possession, exclusion, inclusion and control. Fixing and containing communities into rigid geographical blocks provided colonial power with the knowledge of the region and thereby control over it. The new territorial boundaries and what contained within them became co-constitutive, isomorphic and naturalised the connection between identity and place. Maps did not simply produced borders; it ethnicised these borders by disjuncting indigenous spatial arrangement.

Methodology

The problem of this study is the emergence of a place as a specific space, a homeland. How identity groups are able to talk of a place as their homeland? How does it become possible for the ówe-selfô to be fixed within a geographical grid? How does groups inscribed themselves onto the mapped geography? My contention is that a place as a specific space, a homeland, is produced through discourse ï without

examining homeland as a discourse one cannot possibly makes sense of the immense political investments in its imagination. Homeland is not something out there, already identifiable, know-able, and talk-able territoriality. It is produced through discourse and this is a study of the discourse of ‘Tripura’ as a homeland by competing identity groups. My position is that the competing, alternative version of Tripura as homeland cannot possibly be understood outside discourse.

This study understands the term ‘discourse’ as defined by Michel Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. He defined discourse as ‘a group of statement in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation’.[64] Discourse is a way of representing or producing knowledge through language/text. It determines what can be legitimately said and what constitutes a meaningful statement. This study would consider discourse as a group of texts, spoken or written, symbols or signs that constitute meaning and contributes to a ‘discursive formation’. When a discourse is manifested and found in institutions and practices (including language) it can be called a discursive formation.[65] Though I employ the term ‘discourse’, this study should not be seen as an attempt at Foucauldian analysis of identity and place. My attempt here is to conceptualise ‘homeland’ as a discursive space and thereby offer a spatial perspective to identity politics.

The method of this study then is discourse analysis.[66] Simply defined, it is a method of analysing oral or written communication or any form of text. The focus of analysis

[64] Michel Foucault.1972. *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* Routledge: India (Reprint), pp.120, 121, 130 and 131 (translated by A M Sheridan Smith).
[65] Ibid.
[66] Discourse analysis has been defined as a method of analysing spoken or written communications as ‘social practice’. Its primary objective is to analyse how a text version is designed to compete with one

is the ‘exchange of communication’ between conflicting ideas of social reality. This study understands identity, place and homeland as constructs: they are not given objective realities; rather they are socially produced through discourse. This informs the choice of methodology. I will examine the discourse about ‘place’, its history and geography, and how they are contested by identity groups in Tripura. I will also examine the spaces that produce such discourse, the role of state in imposing certain notion of space to the displacement of the ‘other’. The strategy would be to analyse the premodern and modern discourses about the geography and history of Tripura. It traces the emergence of modern colonial borders and boundaries on the frontier or margin of the British-India leading to conflict and displacement of premodern indigenous spaces and the production of modern mapped Tripura. This shift in conception of space also entailed shift in conception of collective identity.

The emergence of Tripura as a modern state within the postcolonial spatial formation required a new discourse about geography and history of Tripura: new discourse about things and people within this new mapped space. This new discourse about Tripura is challenged by the rise of Tripuri ethno-nationalist groups whose discourse of Tripuri identity consists in reinterpretation of history and geography of Tripura, particularly the colonially demarcated borders of Tripura.

This study therefore, employs discourse analysis at two different junctures: First, when the discourse of premodern indigenous spaces collide, conflict and are displaced by the discourse of colonial spaces; second, when the state sponsored, what this study will term as ‘official’, notion of Tripura is contested and challenged by the Tripuri

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or more alternative versions. See David E McNabb.2004. *Research Methods for Political Science: Quantitative and Qualitative Methods* (Indian Edition), Prenctice-Hall: India, pp.473-4.

ethno-nationalist groups. These competing discourses of Tripura can occur in the interpretation of monuments, archaeological sites, contested place-names, observation of historical events, and of course, in the debate about the ómarginô: the boundary where the imagined dichotomous spaces collide and overlap.

In order to subject the assumed historical continuity and given relationship between space place and identity since antiquity, one must interrogate the disjunction between premodern indigenous space and the modern. This will make possible for a very different perspective of history and geography of Tripura, and thereby provide a framework from which to challenge the present discourses of identity politics. The strategy of this study, then, is to analyse the history of premodern and modern spatial organisation: the displacement of premodern indigenous space and the imposition of modern space. Central to the study is how modern colonial map making produced rigid discontinuous place, the boundary of which is contested in the making of modern political identities in Tripura.

Written texts constitute the most important data for this study. However, other forms of texts (such as oral, transcripts of conversation or interviews and symbolic landscapes) are used or relied upon. I used three kinds of written texts. First, I relied on *chronicles of former ruling dynasty, reports on administration*; second*, maps and documents of border demarcation* and; third, *postcolonial documents*. The first category of texts include precolonial documents of Manikya dynasty of Tripura and Tai-Ahom dynasty of present day Assam and early colonial writings in order to understand the precolonial indigenous space and place making. In the second category, this study used colonial documents on border agreements and disputes and

letters between the British-India and former rulers of Tipperah (Tripura) to locate the historical and geographical context of the construction of placed-bound identities and Tripura. Finally, I relied on pamphlets, leaflets, articles, memorandums and websites of the ethno-nationalist groups to identify how this constructed place was/is imagined and defined and how the colonial borders are appropiated in the discourses on identity. In the fourth and (particularly) fifth chapter, I used Tripuri oral histories and interviews (in the form of conversations) with ethno-nationalist to clarify certain points.

I used the first category of text to re-conceptualize precolonial indigenous space. The second category of texts is used to analyse the conflict of indigenous spatial arrangement and colonial spatial order. Finally, from the third category of written texts I tried to reconstruct the contested narration and different versions of place/ identity in Tripura.

Data collection was carried out in various archives and libraries. Some of which are Tribal Research Institute and Museum (Agartala), Tripura Legislative Assembly library, Tripura University library, Indian Council of Social Science Research (Northeast Region), Nehru Memorial Library. For historical documents on Tripura I relied on the compiled publications by Twipra Historical Society. As part of my field research I conducted interviews (in the form of conversation) with Tripuri ethno-nationalists. A small part of my arguments in chapter 4 and 5 were drawn from conversations with individuals I met on my visit to various ópplaces of memoryô (cemetery/crematorium of Rajas of Tripura and memorials/monuments).

This study used the term ‘Tripuri’ to denote various indigenous tribes inhabiting colonially demarcated ‘Independent Tippera’. This is done with full acknowledgement of the fact that Tripuri is a contested identity: not all indigenous communities use this term to identify themselves. Despite this limitation, I used the term ‘Tripuri’ to juxtapose against the identity ‘Bengalee-Hindu’ since every indigenous tribe view the Bengalees as ‘outsider’, and since one of the most durable criteria of division of collective identity have been ‘hills people’ (denoting the various tribes) and ‘plains people’ (denoting the Bengaliees). I also used the state sponsored or official discourse and Bengaleeôs discourse of history and geography of Tripura as synonymous.

The Chapters

The study consists of five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the study. It discusses the theories and concepts used and also the objectives and methodology of the study. More importantly, this chapter formulates a set of questions on identity and place. These questions form the starting point of my investigation into a particular space, homeland.

The second chapter will provide an overview of premodern indigenous space in the region: the history and geography of the region before colonisation by British-India. It seeks to provide a different history and geography of place from the ones constructed by the state and the Tripuri ethno-nationalists. More specifically, in this chapter, I will attempt to reconstruct precolonial spatial arrangement and carry out a different

reading of geography ï a reading which will be used to problematise the prevailing ideas of Tripura.

The third chapter will discuss the incursion of British-India into the present day region straddling the borders of three postcolonial states (India, Myanmar and Bangladesh). It analyses the role of colonial explorers in the colonial project of mapping the region and producing mapped and marked spaces and the subsequent displacement of indigenous spaces. It will argue how historically and geographically Tripura has been arbitrarily and artificially created into a well-defined place with its marked boundaries through boundary contestations, and agreements between the colonial power and the rulers of Tripura. The second and third chapter form the basis from which to problematise the two modes of historiography in Tripura.

Chapter four details the emergence of postcolonial nation states and seeks to locate the present day Tripura within the spaces of nation-states. It traces how the new discourse on nationhood and sovereignty displaced the old colonial discourse on space and place and Tripura. The abolition of monarchy and the emergence of new form of political power entailed imposition of new notion of Tripura, the place and the people. This new discourse of history and place was also a discourse of modern Tripuraôs border, particularly the new international border, the definition of which made possible the notion of Tripura as home of ótribal and non-tribalô.

Chapter five discusses the rise of Tripuri ethno-nationalist forces in reaction to the displacement ófTripuriôsô sense of place and indigenousness. This chapter will look into Tripuri ethno-nationalist groupsô attempts to re-define place and reconstruct

history of Tripura. This re-definition and reconstruction involves attempts to imagine geography and history of Tripura different from the official version. Central to the ethno-nationalist discourse is the re-definition of the border and thereby construct the ‘other’ as ‘outsider’ and ‘refugee’.

By now it is apparent that this study inhabits the borderlands of academic boundaries. To explore questions of space, place and identity one must inevitably rely on inter-disciplinary approach. In order to understand when identity actually becomes ‘political’ I have strayed into fields such as geography, history and cultural anthropology. Drawing from diverse disciplines and diverse methodological approaches I have attempted to carry out a critical reading of modern ideas of homeland. In this sense my approach is eclectic, directed towards singular project of critical reading of modern geographies of place and identity.

Chapter II

Geography of Precolonial Tipperah

Wherever there are hills, the Tipperas lived there.[1]

History and geography are two of the many instruments of production of place identities. In order to produce the ‘imaginedô collectivity and sculpt it onto an identifiable territory, premodern spatial realities have to be appropriated.[2] This act involves appropriation of a past so that imagining continuity of place and identity becomes possible, thereby identity groups must erase the contingency, disruptions and dislocations of modern places. Therefore, to deconstruct modern spatial ideologies, one must pan the lens backward and subject premodern spaces to scrutiny. Instead of delving into past (history and geography) for proofs of modern identities, I propose to portray spatial arrangements of radically different and multiple social realities.

History is the favourite haunt of modern state, nationalist, ethno-nationalist and other protagonists of modern political identity. Fictive claims of past rulers, embellishment of their power, glory and greatness, are ferreted out by groups wishing to confront, challenge and suppress others ways of thinking about place and identity. This is because, as Lefebvre points out, ‘space is politicalô.[3] There are always ‘otherô views

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[1] A perceptive comment about Tipperas by Ahom ambassadors (Ratna Kandali and Arjun Das) while describing the capital of Tipperah in 1724 in their report of Tipperah known as *Tipperah Buranji*. For this study I used the edited version by Tripur Chandra Sen.1997. *Tripur Desher Katha*, Tripura Tribal Research Institute: Agartala, p.45.

[2] The premodern spatial realities are imagined as unchanging sites of identity. In the study of nationa(lism) in Thailand, Thongchai argues how the geo-body of the nation is a by-product of modern cartography and yet Thai nationhood is imagined to have existed prior to this particular geographical surgery, see Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of the Nation*, pp. 140-174. Also see Benedict Anderson (1991), on how maps in their second avatar become a logo, a sign, instead of a compass to the world. This makes possible for tightly bounded territorial units to be conceptualized as having antiquity, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso: London and New York (revised edition), pp.170-78.

[3] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space,* p.74.

of place, which threatens, and at times seek to dislodge prevailing notions of place. As Foucault opines, ôthe real scandal of Galileoôs work lay not so much in his discovery, or rediscovery, that the earth revolved around the sun, but in his constitution of an infinite, and infinitely open space. In such a space the places of Middle Ages turn out to be dissolved.ö[4] This notion of ôinfinitely open spaceô threatened to displace the Judeo-Christian notion of place, of the location of the earth and heavenly bodies. Modern discontinuous places, from largest (Nation-State) to smallest territorial formation confront other ways of imagining that particular space which seek to erase and re-inscribe new text onto the landscape.

Premodern Tipperah, before this particular place was mapped into discontinuous geographical space, was a ônon-state spaceô[5] where mobile people kept the state at bay. The state-space was barely a small fortified capital which was the state-centre, appeared ôlittle more than a villageô to the English. However, it controlled large chunks of alluvial plain, where Bengalees cultivated fixed farm agriculture and produce surplus grain. In the postcolonial period, the Bengalee elites, who came to be enclosed within this new geography, had to invent new notion of Tripura (space). This new notion of place, backed by official power, attained hegemonic ascendance. But there are other notions of place, albeit invented, of which Tripuri ethno-nationalistsô notion of place have posed stiff challenges to the officially sanctioned notion.

The protagonists of these two conflicting or contesting notions about Tripura resort to distortion (reproduction) of past and premodern geographies. When history and

[4] See Michel Foucault, *Of Other Spaces*.
[5] Premodern state as made up of ôstate spaceô (state core, fortified state-centre) and outside this realm as ônon-state spaceô has been convincingly theorised by James C Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, pp.40-63.

geography are intimately linked in the construction of modern identities, it becomes pertinent to reconstruct history and geography, though not with the intention of adjudicating the two notions, but to subject them to deconstruction.

In this chapter, my intention is to establish the position that the two notions about Tripura succumb to a deeply problematic conceptualisation of precolonial space and place. These two discourses seek to position and frame their different political projects within the framework that Tripura inhabited a continuous space since ‗immemorial time'. This view of ‗continuous space' projects modern history and geography of Tripura onto ancient or premodern past as if space is absolute, permanent and eternal. This chapter will challenge this view of Tripura as inhabiting a continuous space and argue how place-making was radically different prior to colonisation of the region, and that modern identities and categories need to be understood as inhabiting a very differently conceptualised space and is meaningful only within that space.

History and Geography: Viewing with the Map

Map is the best place to begin this deconstruction of place/identity Tripura. The map has been one of the instruments of production of permanent eternal place, especially by modern nationalists or ethno-nationalists. For the nationalists, instead of viewing map as something which made imagination of national space possible or as geographical knowledge which historically produced the nation, the map becomes

proof of existence of eternal, immutable place, the nation-space.[6] Here the map (Fig. 2.1), though not on the scale, and as complex as the nation, is used as spatial technique of linking particular place (Tripura) to the nation-space India, and to simultaneously produce eternal, unchanging idea of place.

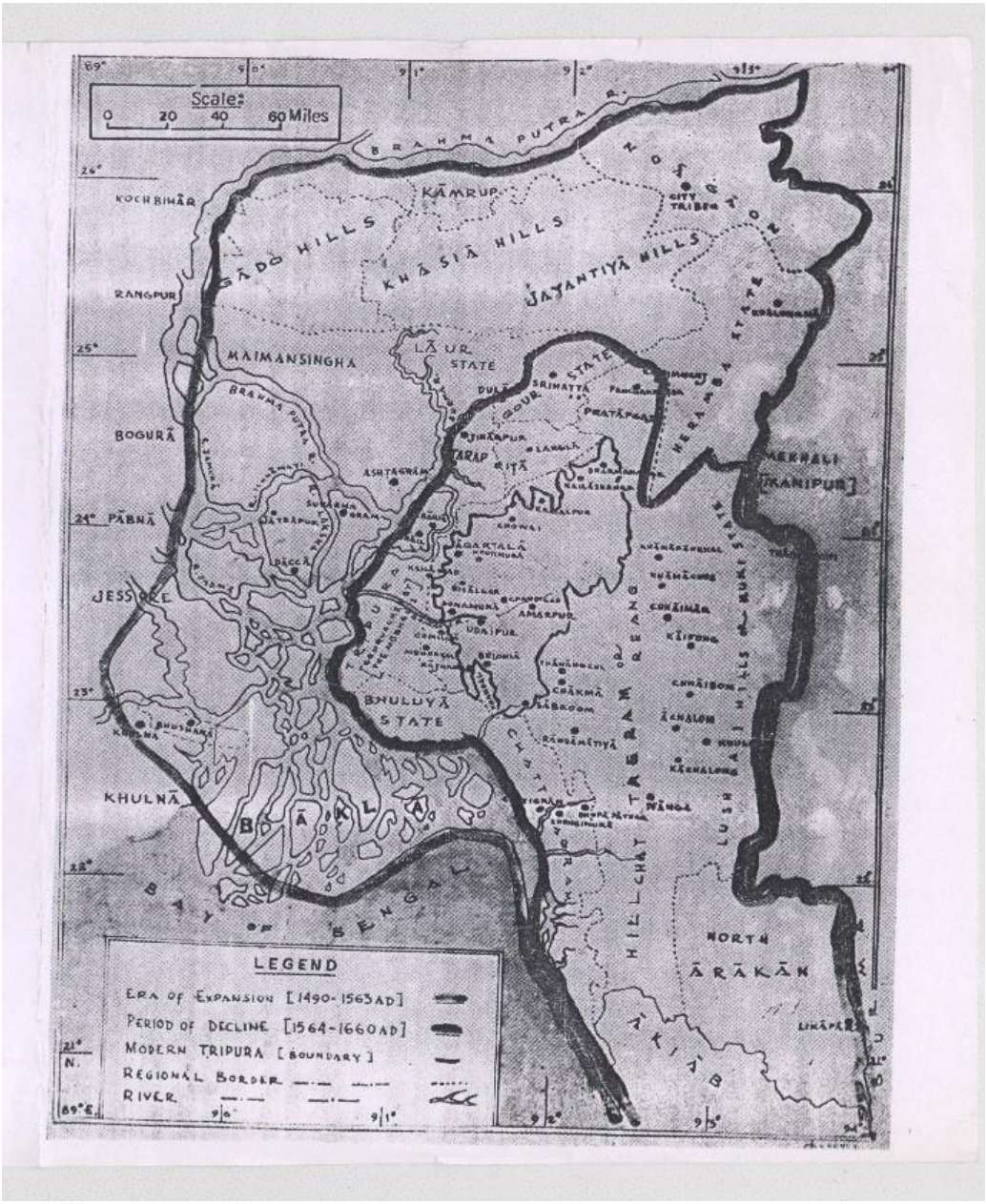
The map also erases pre-mapped geographical realities. Therefore, in order to reconstruct the pre-mapped geographical realities, the historical map becomes a deeply problematic tool. Therefore one must introduce other ways of seeing premodern space. This would enable the problematisation of the discourses of modern place/identities.

The intention of this map, though in many ways is an attempt to construct a powerful, great premodern state, is to produce a common past between Tipperas (and other communities) and Bengalees by locating them inside a permanent place, albeit expanding and shrinking place. Tripuri ethno-nationalists would use similar spatial narrative to lay claim to a vast and great kingdom in the past.[7] Both these acts consist in appropriation of past spaces in their contested discourses of modern place Tripura. There are two fundamental problems with this mapôs attempt to appropriate past spaces by locating them inside modern spatial grid (map).

[6] See Thongchai Winichakul, *Siamed Mapped*, pp.140-63 (the chapter on geo-body of the nation); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 70-78, on Map as second avatar; Manu Goswami.2004. *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space*, Permanent Black:Delhi; and Mathew Edney.1997. *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British-India, 1765-1843*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago/London. The last two studies attempt to argue against the notion that Indiaôs nation-space existed prior to colonization.

[7] The anthem of Twipra Student Federation, *Kusung Kusung*, makes claim over vast tract of present day northeast India extending from Brahmaputra valley to Arunachal Pradesh and upto Arrakan Hills in Burma. The song eulogize past glory of Tripura kingdom which is believed have conquered the entire territories that today comprise the northeast India, and ruled over it.

Fig. 2.1. A mapped perspective of prevailing historiography of expansion and contraction of Tripura based on Manikyan chronicle Rajmala. (Source: Ramani Mohan Sarma, *Political History of Tripura*, Puthipatra, 1987)



The first problem lies in its (modern maps) inadequacy, rather impossibility, to represent precolonial or premodern spaces. Maps do not represent realities.[8] They produce realities conceived or perceived by the map maker. These realities are constructed for political projects conceptualised by the authority sanctioning its making. As Edney puts it, cartography constructs ña rational and ordered space that could be managed and governed in a rationale and ordered manner according to a rigorous administrative accountancy andé ..an ideology of transcendent law and sovereignty.ò[9] Map makes space legible by fixing people to particular named places and demarcated territories.[10] This can be seen as an attempt by the colonial power to sedentarise mobile population. As James Scott asserts, sedentarisation of mobile population is ó*state*ôs attempt to make society legible, to arrange population in ways that simplified the classic state functions of taxation, conscription and prevention of rebellion.ò[11]

The toponymies, in the map above, are product of colonial organisation of space and are meaningful only within colonial spatial grid, prior to which these toponymic identifications do not have meaningful reference.[12] Therefore, any attempt to put the

[8] J B Harley, *Deconstructing the Map*, p.277.
[9] Mathew Edney, *Mapping an Empire*, p.34.
[10] Yhome, *Making of Modern Naga Identity,* p.101.
[11] James C Scott.1998. *Seeing Like A State: How Certain Schemes To Improve Human Conditions Have Failed*, Yale University Press: New Haven and London, p.2.
[12] Mapping and naming people and place is a pre-requisite for colonisation of land, people and resources. Bodhisattva Kar has aptly argued that ó*toponymic identification was a major site of ideological investment that work to neutralize the space of British-India*ô, see *What is in a Name? Politics of Spatial Imagination in Colonial Assam*, (CENISEAS Paper, Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development, 2004) p. 3. Martin Lienhard and Carlos Perez (1992), gives a good example of Columbus transformation of indigenous toponym of the Antilles, ñwriting facilitated the imperial power to record their power on all possible surfaces of the new world. European power was engraved (not just metaphorically) on new landscapes through the Christianization of the indigenous toponymy. In his first journal entries, Columbus, with a stroke of pen transformed the toponym of the Antilles: ñThis (Island) of San Salvadorò (October 4), ñwhich (island) I named Carta de la Concepcionò (October 15), Which I named Fernandinaò (October 15), ñwhich I named Isabellaò (October 19). These new toponyms represented the conquerorsô dual, religious political, powerò, in ñWriting and Power in

precolonial, and pre-mapped spatial realities inside modern spatial grid constitute a fundamental problem.

The map depicts precolonial Tipperah as having clearly demarcated boundaries (which is by-product of modern cartography) and delineates its gradual shrinkage during the British-India colonial period. By putting place-names and people (which were inscribed and demarcated by the colonial power) inside modern frame (map) these modern contingent places are ascribed reality, continuity and permanence. Precolonial indigenous space is made possible to be viewed from a very modern way of looking at spatial reality preventing other ways of looking at these realities. There are other ways of looking at the precolonial indigenous spatial realities. This view does not need the help of a map, for it is doubtful, if these spatial realities can be known with the help of map, or possibility of mapping these realities.

The second problem lies in its misconception of nature of premodern padi state, Tipperah. The historianôs reconstruction of past (like this map) is based on court chronicles which were mixture of fiction and myths about great lineage, glory and power.[13] The underlying characters of the premodern states/kingdoms have always been exaggeration of its actual power. Commenting about the chronicles of Southeast Asian kingdoms, James Scott writes, ñdynastic, capital-city, text-based historiesò are ñchiefly useful as self-interested descriptions and cosmological claims.ò ñTheir cosmological claims and ideological reach were far greater than their practical control

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the Conquest of America, Latin American Perspectiveò, Vol. 19, No. 3. *Five Hundred years of Colonisation: Struggle for Emacipation and Identity* (summer) pp.79-85.

[13] In this view, history is merely the rule by long list of kings (their wars and greatness) mentioned in the court chronicle. Modern Tripuri ethno-nationalist would use the evidentiary long list of kings to claim a ónationô since antiquity.

over human labour and grain.ò[14] The modern state and ethno-nationalist would own, embellish óthe glory, continuity and beneficence of their ancestorsô and ómined and distortô the history of classical state in the óinterest of identifying a proto-nation and a proto-nationalism that could be of use against contemporary enemies, both foreign and domestic.ò[15]

Much of the hills, which were later named by British-India colonial power (this is the subject of next chapter), were in true sense ónon-state spacesô characterised by mobile population, shifting hill agriculture and pliable identities. These were the óillegible spacesô not readily suitable for appropriation by the padi state. In these spaces, modern notion of sovereignty, territorial control and subject/non-subject were meaningless and cannot be represented in modern spatial grid.[16]

A Geography of Tipperah: Viewing without the Map

Writing about the frontiers of Burma, Edmund Leach suggested that the key condition for the formation of premodern state is the availability of heartland of irrigated rice cultivation that might constitute a ñfully-administered territorial nucleus, having court capital at its center.ò[17] Taking this point further, James Scott argued:

> Where the heartland of irrigated rice was large and contiguous, it might under the right condition, facilitate the rise of major state; where the heartland was modest, it might, also under right condition give rise to a modest state. A state on this account

[14] James C Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed,* p.35.
[15] James Scott, ibid.
[16] See James Scottôs argument about precolonial Burma. Instead of visualising óa sharply delineated, contiguous territory following the mapmaking convention of modern states, óBurma is better seen as a horizontal slice through the topography, taking in most areas suitable for wet rice below three hundred meters and within the reach of the courtô. James C Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, p.54.
[17] Edmund R Leach.1960. ñThe Frontiers of Burma*"*, in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 3, pp. 49-68, (quotation from p.58).

> would be a fortified town of, say atleast six thousand subjects plus nearby hill allies, situated on wet rice plain and having, in theory at least a single ruler. Scattered through out mainland Southeast Asia, often at fairly high altitudes, one finds the agro-ecological conditions that favour state formation, usually on a more Lilliputian scale. Most such places were at one time or another sites of small Tai statelets. More rarely, leagues of confederacies of such statelets might combine, briefly to forge, a moe formidable state. State formation around wet rice cores, large or small, was always contingent and, typically, ephemeral. One might emphasise with Edmund Leach the fact that ñthe rice land stayed at one placeò and thus represented a potential ecological and demographical strong point, which clever and lucky political entrepreneur might exploit to create a new, or revived, state space. Even a successful dynasty was by no means a Napoleonic state; it was rather a shaky hierarchical of nested sovereignties. To the degree that it held together, the glue was a prudent distribution of spoils and marriage alliances and, when necessary, punitive expedition for which, in final analysis, control over man power was vital.[18]

The region, northeast India, have been, geographically connected to the upland Southeast Asia constituting what David Ludden calls ówspaces of mobilityô.[19] Edmund Leachôs analysis, of state space on the frontiers of Burma and James Scottôs treatment of larger Southeast Asian massif have enormous implications for the explanation of the rise of premodern states in the present northeast India. The rise of modest premodern states likes Ahom (Assam), Cachar, Manipur and Tipperah, in this region, to a large extent, depended on control of large tracts of alluvial plains and sedentary population to cultivate these alluvial plains. These premodern states were, by no means, sovereign powers exercising complete sway over the entire hills. In fact, larger population of the region, inhabiting the higher altitude, neither recognised political

[18] James Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, pp.52-53.

[19] David Ludden.2005. ñWhere is Assam?ò *Himalmag,*Vol. 18, No. 3 (November, 2005) <http://www.himalmag.com/component/content/article/1676-where-is -Assam?.html> (accessed Feb. 20, 2006).

authority of any of these states, nor acknowledged overlordship of any sovereign power until colonisation by British-India.[20]

This section will attempt to rethink the geography of Tipperah under the Manikya dynasty ï how the state organised space, arranged its population and locates its spatial ideologies. I attempt to do this by drawing from primarily two historical texts: the chronicle of Manikya dynasty known as ôRajmalaô[21] (garland of kings) and the Tripura Buranji.[22]

Manikyan Spatial Ideologies

The Rajmala opens with Dharma Manikyaôs (1431-62 A D) desire to learn of his ancestorsô history from the Brahmins in his court. After an elaborate construction of mythical lunar dynasty within Indic cosmology, the narrative begins with certain king *Daitya* ruing the nature of his kingdom ï the land as unholy infested with wild people, *kiratras,* and wild animals.[23] The kingôs only son, Tripur, had become *kirata*-like ï he neither studied Vedas nor received education from Brahmins. The importance of this narrative lies in the rulerôs desire to invent an elaborate genealogy within the Indic cosmological framework.

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[20] Through out the 19th century there were intermittent Lushai/kookie raids (also raid by Nagas) in the British-India territories. The Tipperah state or for that matter other states like Cachar and Manipur acknowledged their inability to rein in these raiding tribes. There was also confusion as to their overlordship. British-India realized the need to tame these ómarauding tribesô by enclosing them within demarcated territories. This was the beginning of colonial cartographic surgery. In large part this is the history Alexander Mackenzie (1884) weaves in his *The Northeast Frontier of India* (reproduced in 1999 by Mittal: New Delhi).

[21] For this study I use the English translated version by Dr. Narendra Chandra Nath.1999. *Sri Rajmala,* Tribal Research Institute: Agartala. Originally the writing of ôRajmalaô began during the reign of Dharma Manikya (1431-62 AD).

[22] This is the account of Tipperah given by three Ahom (present day Assam) ambassadors to Tipperah who visited thrice during 1709-15.

[23] Narendra Chandra Nath, *Sri Rajmala*, pp.12-15.

More importantly, this opening narrative announces the appearance of a stable political centre with written (frozen) texts where entire history and genealogy is supposed to be recorded. It also announced, in what may be a controversial reading, the stigmatisation and silencing of the *Dongoima-Dongoifa* history and geography. In the vernacular or oral history of the Tripuris, the beginning of Tripura and the very idea of Tripuri is attributed to these two leaders, now popular folktale legends. These two names appear in the written genealogy as predecessors to Chengthum Fa who established his sway over large tracts of Bengal. In the folktale imagined geographies, Tripura originated on the confluence of (now sacred rivers) *Raima-Saima* remembered as the *Dongoi* or *Dongor*. This history and the story of this geography were erased with the appropriation of Indic cosmography which was conducive to state-making enterprise. This aspect will be taken up in the fourth chapter when I discuss the rival geographies of Tripuri ethno-nationalism.

This stigmatisation of a geography and its inhabitants offers two important insights about the premodern state-making enterprise in Tripura. One, the narrative may be read as a need for a genealogy and a cosmological framework by the wannabe political and religious elites in the premodern state-making enterprise. Secondly, the narrative of a geography as ówildô (to the eye of state-making agent) may be read as a geography illegible to state-making enterprise. In a very rudimentary sense, premodern state-making enterprise was based on the ability by political elites to concentrate manpower and grain.[24] A legible geography (preferably alluvial plain instead of a mountainous terrain) and a cosmology were pre-requisite for successful

[24] For this argument I am indebted to James Scottôs analysis of upland southeast Asia. For elaborate reading on this see chapter three ñConcentrating Manpower and Grain, Slavery and Irrigated Riceò, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, pp.64-97.

concentrating of manpower and grain. Without these, pre-modern Tripura may be read as a moving place (or state), instead of an expanding and contracting state as narrated by the map above.[25]

These geographical impediments can be said to have been resolved, to certain extent, after a certain Tippera chief Chengthum Fa (13th century) gained control over large swath of alluvial plains, later called óChakla Roshanababadô (by Mughals who subdued Tipperah rulers) and subsequently óBritish Tipperahô or óPlain Tipperahô (by the British).[26] But without a concentrated surplus producing manpower, disappearance or disintegration of state constituted a major problem.[27] A relatively stable state would appear only after Ratna Fa, who with the help of Gaud of Bengal (to whom Ratan Fa became a tributary) re-established his capital at Rangamati (later named Udaipur). Ten thousand Bengalees, comprising of nine castes, were taken from Gaudôs territory and re-settled at Udaipur and all over the alluvial plains gifted by the Bengal ruler.[28]

The reasons for failure of state-making, disintegration and population transplantation/relocation (might well have been physical capture) do not need elaboration ï the hill people make good mercenaries, not good peasants. Ratna Fa (who was conferred the title Manikya by Gaud) is credited for induction of Brahmins, incorporation of Hindu cosmography and re-organisation of the state-core. His

[25] One may read the narration of Tripuraôs history (prior to Chengthum Faôs reign in the Thirteenth century) of constant change of capital owing to wars (among successors) and disintegration as failure of state-making. It can also be read as search for suitable geography and population. See *Sri Rajmala*, p.34-43.
[26] According to Rajamala these alluvial plains were wrested from Bengal ruler Gaud in the 15th century, *Shri Rajmala*, pp.45-17.
[27] In fact it appears that Chengthum Faôs consolidation of territories disintegrated very quickly. He sent his youngest son Ratna Fa (who became Ratna Manikya and from whose reign many Tripura historians based the beginning of modern history) to the palace of Bengal ruler Gaud (probably as an apprentice). Ratna Fa returned and re-conquered the disintegrated territories. See *Sri Ralmala*, pp.48-51.
[28] *Sri Rajmala*, pp.52-3.

grandson, Dharma Manikya, is credited for commissioning (the Brahmins) the writing of the court chronicle, *Rajmala*, and thereby beginning the process of self-Hinduisation by introducing Brahmanical protocol and ritual.[29] Tipperah as an identifiable geography, relatively immobile place but always erratic, ephemeral or episodic, need to be located within this history: Indic cosmography, caste based state-core, and relocated sedentarised surplus producing Bengalee population.

The geography of Tipperah then can be read in this way ï alluvial plains (extractive space), hills (spaces of mobility), and State-core on the foot hills (organised around caste system).[30] The State core was located on the interstices of hills and plains. It can be conceptualised as a space where the hill-ness and plain-ness merged, melted and conflicted, yet produced and precariously sustained the state. It was also a space within which the hill communities allowed wannabe rulers, yet consciously keeping a distance from the hierarchically structured state-core. This spatial arrangement, upon which state making was contingent, maybe termed as Manikyan spatial ideologies. The Manikya rulers strategically incorporated the already available cosmography, and already available surplus producing concentrated subjects.

[29] This process of self-Hinduisation by Tipperah court center is not an exception. In fact, all the premodern states in the present day northeast India region underwent similar process. Similarly, as shown by James Scott, the earliest court centers in Cambodia, Java, Burma and Siam (Thailand) borrowed the ritual technology from Indian subcontinent. He writes, ósanskritized personal and place names were substituted for the vernacular. Monarchs were consecrated by maginal Brahminical rites and given mythical genealogies tracing a divine origin. Indian iconography and epics were introduced, along with complex ceremonies of South Indian courtô, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, pp.111-112.
[30] I draw upon the arrangement/classification of population and description of Tipperah by three Ahom Ambassadors who visited Tipperah thrice during 1709-15. The population on the hill, close to the capital, were described as óTipperahô, and the mobile population on higher hills farthest from the capital were described as óKukis. The capital was located strategically at the foot hills and population arranged according to caste system. The capital was connected to the ówell developed villagesô of Bengalee farmers on the borderlands of what (then) constituted óBengalô.

The Manikyan state space, confined to the capital located on the bank of river Gomoti, separated the hills and the plains. The palace was situated on the plain side of the river around which commercial and religious activities were organised. The Bengalee-Hindus were settled around ponds based on their caste.[31] The palace was surrounded by temples for various Hindu gods and indigenous gods of the Tipperas.[32] These sites were connected to the ówell developedô (read wet agriculture) villages on one side and óimpenetrable hillsô (read hill agriculture) on the other. The well developed villages, categorised as *Perganas*, constitute the permanent taxable surplus producing land inhabited by Bengalee-Hindus and Bengalee-Muslims. These *Perganas* also constitute the boundary between the óMuslim stateô (read Mughals) and the Tipperah state.

Bengalees (Hindus and Muslims) constituted the permanent surplus producing (wet or valley agriculture) subjects. The sedentarised population (in the Tipperah capital) were connected to the undivided Bengal by means of culture, language and religion. These valley places were legible state spaces for appropriation and state-making function. These were the spaces of contention between the Tipperah and Mughals and later British-India. These places were also spaces of concentration characterised by migration and over population.

Paddy was the most important grain for accumulation of power. The people of Bengal ï their social, cultural and religious tradition were best suited for sedentarised life ï their wet land plough agriculture constituted the ultimate technology for mass production of paddy. Tipperah rulersô fascination of the Bengalees becomes evident

[31] Tripur Chandra Sen, *Tripur Desher Katha*, p.46.
[32] Tripur Chandra Sen, *Tripura Desher Katha*, pp.41-47.

when Ratna Fa, who captured Rangamati with the help of ruler of Gaud (Bengal), brought ten thousand Bengalees of all castes and settled two thousand families at Rangamati and the rest in and around Meherkul for which he became a tributary to Gaud. This process also set into motion adoption of Indic or Brahminical cosmography. Ratna Fa adopted the title Manikya, dug ponds (on the banks of which Bengalee-Hindus were settled based on their castes), and constructed Hindu religious sites (temples, sacred spots). When the ambassadors of Ahom, visited Udaipur (Rangamati) in the early Eightennth century, the capital have been converted into a thriving economic centre.[33]

The Tipperah rulers were able to build a stable padi state through adoption of Hindu cosmological framework and settlement of surplus paddy producing population in the plains. It is not clear exactly when this successful incorporation of Indic cosmography occurred. But it is clear that by middle of fifteen century, Dharma Manikya decreed the writing of history of his dynasty in which a mythic Hindu past was invented. In the Rajmala, his immediate predecessors, who used the title *Fa* bore Tripuri names, before them, names of his ancestors (most of them fictional) were assigned names from Vedic pantheon.

Instead of viewing the state as ever-expanding (like the map above) and contracting phenomenon, it would make more sense to view it as confined to the state centre. The state centre can be seen as fortified town from where the ruling religious-political elites controlled grain production in the alluvial plains of present day Bangladesh. By locating the state centre at the foothill, it could strategically thwart superior invading

[33] *Tripur Desher Katha,* pp.41-47.

powers by escaping into hills. Therefore, the state centre should be seen as a space which connected the mobile hill space and the contested plains. This connection was snapped when the British-India took over Bengal from the Mughals.

Making of Tippera: The mobile hill space

Within the Manikyan geographical arrangement, hill people were classified as ôTipperaô (relatively immobile, inhabit the hills surrounding the state-core), ôKukiô (mobile and ungoverned, inhabit the hills farthest from state-core). A Tippera can loss his/her ôTipperanessô by moving farther upward into the realm of Kuki or downward into the realm of state-core. The identity Tippera or Kuki was open, fluid and non-portable defined by relation of propinquity to the state-core. If self-Hinduisation was a conscious political decision by the political elites, hills as home by the Tipperas was equally political. It allowed a social system which is non hierarchical, egalitarian and mobile.

The ambassadors of Ahom ruler Rudra Singha used a brilliant one liner to describe the Tipperahs: Wherever there are only hills, the Tipperas lived there.[34] This particular observation was made while describing the capital of Tipperah. Travelling from the Cachar capital, at Khaspur, they traversed through mountainous region up to Tippera capital at Udaipur. Their description of the people inhabiting the mountainous terrain traversed by them offers interesting account of people and space. The population living at higher hills, farthest from Tipperah capital, were categorised as kukis or kookies (paid tax in kind to Cachar and Tippera); whereas the population on

[34] *Tripur Desher Katha,* p.4.5

the hills, closer to the capital, were categorised as Tipperas. The Kukis were deemed mobile with no fixed settlement; they paid annual tax to the Tipperah king in kind ï elephant teeth, cotton, woven clothes and spice. The Tipperas lived in settled villages ï eat pork, cremate dead, drink alcohol, religious activities overseen by *chontais* ï and paid annual tax of Rupees Four.[35]

This then is the spatial arrangement of hill population. But it must not have been uncommon for a Tippera to quit relatively sedentary life adjacent to state-centre and become wild and non-Tippera. This situation is not altogether improbable, given the division of Tripuri speaking communities in present day Tripura into separate tribes and their dispersion into hills that now form part of Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, Mizoram and Assam. These do not, in any way, constitute sufficient reasons to be construed as expansion of Tipperah state. It makes more sense to view Tipperas as mobile population and mobility as state evasion technique. For example, the Jamatias and the Reangs were the largest Tripuri speaking groups who resisted the state and moved away from the geographical realm of Tippera and acquired new identity.[36]

The hills space was characterised by thinning and moving population. Tipperah kingsô power did not extend beyond the undulating upland adjacent to his capital. The hill population moved in and moved out of territories claimed by the ruler. As late as

[35] *Tripur Desher Katha*, pp.36-38.
[36] Instead of viewing various Tripuri communities as entering Tripura with their already identifiable and portable identity, it makes more sense to view them as product of resistance to Mankyan state-making. I argue that the so called óJamatiya Revoltô of 1862 was not a rebellion by already identifiable tribe called óJamatiyaô. This was a rebellion by a group of hill subjects categorised as a őTipperasô. It was the rebellion which produced the new identity óJamatiaô. This arguments forms an important part of my paper *From Place Everywhere to Placeless: Space, (Im)mobility and Exclusion*, paper presented at seminar on Asian Borderlands: Enclosure, Interactions and Transformation, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 5-7 November, 2010 (organised by International Institute of Asian Studies, Amsterdam).

1940s Tipperas moved out of territories controlled by the Tipperah king in order to evade tax and other impositions. These spaces were basically non-state spaces or ‘spaces of mobility’. Tipperas who moved out of the territory controlled by the Tippera king, the non state spaces, assumed new identity and became wild, unruly, uncivilised raiding tribe like the Kookies.[37]

The padi state Tippera was characterised by co-existence of state-space (sedentary population, ordered and mass production of paddy) and non-state spaces (mobile population who resisted state by being mobile). Those who lived in the state-space were characterised as ordered, civilised and governable. There are sufficient data to extrapolate that Tippera who inhabited the hills adjacent to the capital lost their Tippera identity once they moved into the state-centre and become fully incorporated into the Hindu cosmography of the court.[38]

The premodern state did not look upward for expansion. It concentrated on extending its sway over the alluvial plains, control of which guaranteed control of surplus grain production and huge sedentarised population. The state-centre, situated on the foothills, was also the only fortified state-space from where it exercised control over these grain producing plains. These alluvial plains also were fiefdom of Mughals in Bengal. The Mughals were, by far, the superior power between the two. Therefore, it made good sense to have fortified state-centre far way from the grain producing

[37] This perhaps explains the existence of numerous kokborok (Tripuri) speaking tribes in the state most of them categorized by the modern state as primitive tribes. These tribes are Reang, Jamatia, Rupini, Koloi, Murashing, Noatia etc’

[38] In fact as late as 1990s Tripuris (especially those who adopted the surname ‘Debbarma’ in the postcolonial period) who moved into urban centres like Agartala adopted surname Debbarman (the addition of ‘n’ as indicative of destigmatising his/her identity). For a perceptive take on Tripura society and Hinduism and the ideologies of the Palace see Suren Debbarman.2006. *An Account of Tripuri Soceity*, Jnan Bichitra:Agartala, pp. 9, 22-24, 32-33 and 41.

centre. This would keep the Mughal power at bay and in case of successful full scale invasion the political elites could easily retreat into the hills.

The alluvial plains were, then, contested agricultural space between the rulers in Bengal and Tipperah. The contest was struggle for control over sedentarised man-power and surplus grain. As long as Tippera recognised Bengalôs sovereignty through payment of tributes, the religious and political establishment of Tipperah were secure. Any act of insubordination on the part of the Tipperah ruler would be treated as defiance to Mughal authority and case for invasion and ouster and replacement. The mobile hill space was zones of refuge from state power, not only for the mobile upland population, but also for the political elites from more powerful states.

The mobile hill space and the contested plains were not disconnected spaces. These two spatial realities facilitated mimetic state formation among formerly mobile groups inhabiting the upland. By locating strategically, in-between these two spaces, the former Tipperah rulers were able to structure a surplus grain absorbing religious-political elites. This spatial arrangement lasted as long as the state was merely confined to its core, as long as, what James Scott calls, ñdistance-demolishing techniquesô (e.g.é all weather roads) were not yet developed. This premodern spatial arrangement was seen by the British-India colonial power as impediment to colonial administration and exploitation. These spaces required erasure and imposition of modern colonial space. The first disruption of this spatial arrangement took place in 1761 when East India Company took over Bengal.

Making of Tippera: Immobility

Precolonial Tipperah, then, classified population as Kuki ź Tippera Ÿ Hindu: incorporation of Tippera into the state core (especially the capital) signified civilisation.[39] Hillness is coded as non-Hindu, a stigmatised space, albeit spaces that produces fighting bodies. Control over the large swath of alluvial plain, a contested extractive space, is contingent upon presence of fighting manpower atop near by hills. Making this hill ï a space that produces fighting bodies ï may be seen as making a Tippera. The question then is, how is this space (the realm of Tippera) produced? Image/fication of gods, enclosed sacred sites, and priesthood modelled after Hindu Brahmin can be argued as, one of the ways of producing the Tippera. In this section, I will make an attempt to articulate this argument.

If there was any form of continuity that can be ascribed to Tippera is its instability. Tripuraôs history, as narrated in the Rajmala, is replete with constant making and un-making of state. There were times when state centre disappeared completely or new power centres emerged to be supplanted by another.[40] These state-making and state-unmaking, a permanent feature, was outcome of struggle (within and without) over the alluvial plains or the valley wet cultivation, control of which meant control over state. The expansion of Tipperah state or the óhorizontal sliceô cut through these alluvial plains instead of upward. To the state-making agents, the hills were illegible space and unsuitable for mass grain production required by religious and political elites. The hill was the óshatter zonesô not only for the mobile but also the ruling elites

[39] This frame is still deployed by many Bengalee writers. For example see Dwijendra Lal Bhowmik.2003. *Tribal Religion of Tripura: A Socio-Religious Analysis*, Tribal Research Institute: Agartala, p. 21.

[40] In the early Eighteenth century the ruling dynasty of Tripura was overthrown and their capital at Udaipur was ransacked and taken over by Samser Gazi, a Muslim subject of Tipperah. For a brief period there was no semblance of state power.

from new power and invading forces. The hills were the non state-space which allowed people to move into places untraceable by the state.

James Scottôs study of the upland Southeast Asia is a brilliant explanation of the relationship between the valley state and the upland mobile people. Mobility, hill agriculture, orality and social formation are techniques of state evasion and capture.[41] These are political positions adopted by mobile people in order to escape slavery and subjectivity in the state. Physical capture and slavery of mobile peoples was the utmost technology of enclosure and incorporation within state space.

But unlike the valley states in the Southeast Asia, in Tipperah forcible settlement of mobile hill population, in permanent villages for wet-cultivation was perhaps absent. The state controlled vast tracts of alluvial plains cultivated by Bengalee farmers. However, fighting man power was recruited from the hill population, usually as mercenaries. Any attempt by the ruler to impose rules, tax and religion was met with their age-old technique of moving away to regions where the king had little or no control.[42] How to make these upland mobile populations, who constitute the fighting manpower, immobile? One of the technologies of sedentary, employed by Tipperah state, was replication or production of a simulacrum, a Hindu-like hill society, a replica ï temples, objectified gods, invented sacred spots and priesthood as sites for social control of relatively mobile hill communities. Physical dispersion of former

[41] *The Art of Not Being Governed*, pp.1-39.

[42] The annual reports of administration of the state since 1872 records perennial movement of hill people out of Tripura. In all the reports, a section ôImmigration and Emigrationô records the movement of people. In this study I used the following compiled reports. Dipak Kumar Choudhury.1996. *Administration Reports of the Political Agency, Hill Tipperah* Vol. I (1872-1878) and Vol. II (1878-79 and 1889-90), Tripura State Cultural and Research Insitute and Museum. Arun Debbarma (et all). 2004. *The Adminstration Report of Tripura State For the Year 194-95, 1914-15and 1918-19*, Tribal Research Institute: Agartala. Mahadev Chakravarty.2002. *Administration Report of Tripura since 1902,* (Vol. 1, II, III and V), Gyan Publishing House: New Delhi.

subjects of Tipperah (categorised as sub tribes of modern category ôTripuriô) into these borderlands is outcome of this history ï and history of escape.

This is because Hinduism, like other modern religion, is necessarily a religion of the sedentarised. It is intrinsically designed to be pastoral, where worship usually takes placed inside enclosed space ï a walled site, an address for god where devotees must turn up. It is also, in this case image worshiping religion, converts god/s into object ï an objectified god, with an address. These characters make these religions suitable in the state-making project. This has always been a reason why non-appropriable indigenous religions are stigmatised by state as ôanimismô, ôsuperstitionô, or ôprimitive religionô.

Unlike the Bengalee-Hindu, mobile communities do/can not carry images of their gods. Neither do they put them in walled sacred residents.[43] In the case of Tipperas and other communities of the region (many of whom has been Christianised) rituals and worship are signified by use of fresh bamboos poles; alters are constructed by inscribed (with thread, cotton, or marks induced by sharp knife) fresh bamboos and animals (sacrificed), alcohol (home brewed) offered to propitiate spirits, gods (good/evil).[44] The site could be river bed, corner of a forest, meeting point of two roads. There are no fixed sacred sites or spots. This way it is easy to move. Walled sacred sites, fixed sacred geographies and idols are impediment to mobility.

[43] The Tripuris (including Brus) still retain their indigenous form of worship ï rituals conducted in the open, no image, and no temple. No doubt gods from Hindu cosmography have been incorporated, but they are merely narrated, venerated, feared; worship, sacrifice, elaborate rituals are still connected to indigenous gods, T Vanlaltlani.2007. *A Study of Religious identity Among the Bru of Mizoram*, pp.81-100; also Sukhendu Debbarma.2003. ñChristianity and Social Change- A Case Study of Kokborok Speaking Peopleò, *Proceedings of Northeast India Historical Association,* Tripura University, Tripura, pp.286-295.

[44] Sukhendu Debbarma.2003. ñBamboo in the Traditional Indigenous Life and Culture of the Kokborok Speaking Communityò, *Proceedings of Northeast India Historical Association*, Guwahati University, pp.253-258.

The option then, for the Tipperah political elites, was either to convert hill people to Hinduism or produce a similar social structure by appropriating indigenous religion. It is hard to articulate the option employed by the Tippera rulers. Given the characteristics of the geography (open upland frontier, dispersed population) it made more sense to adopt the latter instead of pursuing them for forcible conversion. The Tipperah state introduced religious practices that represent impediments to mobility ï idol worship, enclosed sacred sites and fixed sacred geographies.

The famous fourteen gods temple (and the state invented festival associated with it) and the Tripuri Sundari temple can be understood within this ideology ï replicating a Hindu-like hill society.[45] By converting these gods into objectively identifiable, these gods become appropriable by the state. To appropriate gods, they have to be first re-produced into identifiable objects; thereby it becomes possible to give them an address ï a sanctified, enclosed sacred space controlled by Brahmin like priest, the *Chontai*.[46] Once these gods are captured by the state, they were conferred Hindu names and incorporated into Hindu cosmography as Indic pantheon by court Brahmins.[47] This capture of gods by the state is coded by modern historians as blooming of together of the ótribalô and ónon tribalô since antiquity.

[45] Both the temples were constructed during 15th century. While the ôTripuri Sundariô temple has been assigned to Hindu Brahmins, the Fourteen Gods temple was assigned to state appointed Tipperah priest called *Chontai*. After the change of capital, the later was shifted to the new capital at old Agartala. These are the only two temples in Tripura where Tripuris offer animal sacrifice. They still do not construct temples. The popular Tripuri festival *Kharchi ter* is assoiciated with the sacrifice of animals at the Fourteen Gods temple.

[46] The office of the Chontai who oversee rituals in the 14 deitiesô temple is hereditary, whereas post of traditional Tripuri priests known as Ochai/awkchai is open to every male member of the community who is willing to undergo apprenticeship under an established priest.

[47] For a list of indigenous names of the gods and their identification with Hindu pantheon, see Priyabrata Bhattacharjee.1985. ñThe Religious History of the Tipras on the Background of Kharchipujaò, in *Proceedings of Northeast India History Association,* Tripura University, Agartala, pp.99-105.

The worship of fourteen indigenous godsô images, sanctioned by the palace, is an imaginative incorporation by Tipperah kings in order to sedentarise the mobile population who were the backbone of the stateôs fighting men. However, one need to keep in mind that these images are head-images with tiny horns (Hindu idols are generally full images) and their gender is neither male nor female.

The image(fication) of the fourteen gods, I argue, need to be seen as outcome of state making projects ï to make the population immobile. Successful state-making enterprise depended on making land and people legible and appropriable. To appropriate and control the belief system of the mobile population, rulers needed to transform their gods into observable object (no more abstract figure which is portable and worshiped anywhere) and the residents of the gods made sacred (this made possible for gods to be worshiped in a particular constructed sacred spot). Once the entire gods of the Tipperas had been made identifiable objects, and placed or housed in holy sites, kokborok speaking communities (especially groups who today write the permanent last name Debbarma) became more or less immobile population.

The gods were appropriated by making it objectifiable, and giving them a resident with address where individuals must turn up in order to worship them, and offer sacrifice. So, like the Bengalee-Hindus, the subjects for whom the kings erected temples all over its dominion, invented sacred Hindu places, Shrines (Unokuti, Tirhtamukh etc), the Tippera now have their gods no more everywhere, but captured

and walled by the state.[48] The immediate strategy (of resistance) for mobile people would be to leave the state-space and become a Kookie (wild, unruly and raid the state-space). This perhaps had effect on the rulersô decision to abstain from forcible imposition of fixed field cultivation on the Tipperas.

This precolonial indigenous spatial arrangement of Tipperah ï hill, state core and extractive space got disjuncted in 1761 when the combined force of Nawab of Bengal and East India Company óobliged the Rajah (Tipperah) to take to the mountainsô and occupied the extractive space.[49] Colonial imagination of óhillsô as non-productive and disconnected to the valley below worked in queer ways to fashioned its inhabitants as ówild, uncouth and uncivilisedô and legitimise possession over ócivilisedô plain.

The ódisjunctionô of precolonial indigenous spatial arrangement produced a new boundary between hills and plains. This act constituted a major disruption of the old spaces of interconnection between the state-core, hills and extractive plains. The state-core and the hills, severed from its extractive space got designated, in the colonial discourse as óHill Tipperahô. In fact the colonialist imagined óTipperahô as an identifiable hill space and as a distinct group of hill people. These imaginings were shattered once the English, in order to make the newly acquired territories profitable,

[48] There is a controversial story/legend among Tripuris that the Tipperah king had marched into the territories of the wild Kookies and captured their god ógoriaô (whose image is part of the fourteen gods). The story may be read within the ideology of rulers attempt at state-making or subjection of mobile hill communities. For the story see Dwijendra Lal Bhowmik.2003. *Tribal Religion in Tripura: A Socio-Religious Analysis*, Tribal Research Institute: Agartala, p.27. For an argument against this story see Atul Debbarma. 2009. *Baba Goria Mwtai Saboni?* <http://www.tiprasa.com/articles/viewcomm.asp?identity=123> (accessed November 10 2009).
[49] Alexander Mackenzie, *The Northeast Frontier of India,* p.272.

began to push its boundaries upward. The resistances came, not from the Tipperah ruler, but from those inhabiting the marches between the premodern states.[50]

Divested of its control over plain land, Tipperahôs political and religious elites needed to convert hill tracts into new extractive space. This project had two objectives: one, to take control over lowlands and outlaying mid slopes that protruded into the newly named ôBritish Tipperahô or ôPlain Tipperahô and transform tiny valleys, river banks into cultivable fields. Second, the need to reproduce, even at the point of sword, a Hinduised hill society. The latter objective assumed urgency owing to initially unsuccessful attempts by the state to lure Bengalee peasants (who were now categorised by default as British subjects) into the newly marked state.[51]

Invention of Hindu sacred geographies,[52] which are today summoned by Bengalee historians as proof of early colonisation of Tripura by Aryans, needs to be situated within this project of alchemising the hills as extractive space. These invented sacred spots ï names of rivers, hills and place ï can be interpreted as ideological investment (by fiscally desperate or revenue starved political and religious elites), especially discourse of these places as holy sites connected to stories of mythical Hindu gods and goddesses. These sites became sacred to the Bengalee-Hindus only in the post-

[50] In this study I have in mind the Lushais and Kukis. But this also equally true of the Nagas. While the premodern states were easily subdued, these independent communities on the marches resisted colonial power for about a century.

[51] After annexation of alluvial plain by British-India, Tipperahôs economy was in quandary ï the Rajah seemed to be falling to debt every year, Dipak Kumar Choudhury, *Administration Report of the Polticial Agency, Hill Tipperah,1872-78*, Vol. 1, p. 45. Also see Mahadev Chakravarty, *Administration Report of Tripura State Since 1902*, Vol. 1, p.55.

[52] For example see the narrative about these sacred spaces in K D Meonon (ed).1975.*Tripura District Gazetteer*, Department of Education, Government of Tipura, p.7. As early as 1963 Sunil Dutt, a member of state legislature had already announced the need for new history. ñRajmala is not a history. It only tells about legendsé .in sonamura, sabroom, Belonia subdivisions and areas within the subdivisions we find images of various deities scattered. History of Tripura can be constructed from these imagesò, *Assembly proceedings*, Series 1, Vol. 1-9 October, 1963, p.9.

independent period, prior to which these sites lay in ruins indicating their failure to attract Hindu pilgrims ï in the eye of the political elite potential cultivators.

The history of entire Nineteenth century and first half of Twentieth century can be described as a history of state making on the hills ï map making, census taking, cadastral survey, geological explorations, introduction of modern administrators (borrowed from Indian civil service), introduction of foreign seeds into the hills, campaign for cow (instead of buffalo) and plough cultivation. This period was also a period of Hinduisation of hills ï induction of paid Bengalee Brahmins into the hills, imposition/introduction of sacred thread, prohibition of beef, pork, she-got, fowl.[53] To produce state, in the hills, it must simultaneously produce a Hinduised hill society, a society amenable to state-making. These enterprises pushed people into the periphery, on the newly produced borderland. Simultaneously, it involved attempt at complete subjection of the Kuki population outside the ambit of British-India constructed enclosed geography. Therefore, the produced periphery becomes a veritable place for multiple new named people.

Tipperas who resisted these state enterprise were captured, brought to the capital, and were either hanged (as an example to those who resist) or forcibly converted to Hinduism ï their head shaven, body purified by sacred thread and given Hindu names.

[53] For example in 1880 the ruler of Tipperah launched a movement to raise the status of the Rajah and other Tipperas to kshatriya Hindu. It is believed the Raja bribed Bengalee Brahmins to support him. The Tipperas were ordered to wear sacred thread; prohibited from eating pork, fows, she-goat etcé This movement was opposed by Hindus of British Tipperah. See *The Bengal Administration Report*, 1881-82, pp.14-17; also K D Menon (ed),*Tripura District Gazetteers*, pp. 111-112). More than a century later a Bengalee writing about it takes jibe at Bengalee-Hindus, ñBut actually it was a great blunder on the part of the Bengalee society, especially the Brahmin leaders. If they supported the movement the tribals would have become caste Hindusé é difference between tribals and Bengalees would vanish long time agoò, Dwijendralal Bhowmik, *Tribal Religion of Tripura*, pp.158-59.

They were also prohibited from eating pork, she-goat and fowl.[54] The technology of subjection initially was the appropriation of *indigenous gods* (more importantly it was the mind) which had to be appropriated and controlled in order to sedentarise the mobile population in the non state-spaces. Then the target shifts to the *body - shaven head, sacred thread and name change.* The body becomes the object of appropriation, imposition and control.

Tipperah as Borderless Place

The colonising power always imagined the existence of a place already identifiable, with clearly demarcated territoriality and a power centre. Place is conceptualised as an identifiable territoriality and thereby to be mapped and made a colonisable object. The colonially produced map is then used by modern identity groups to construct continuity of a place identifiable with certain kind of people. The map is no longer a colonial intervention, rather representation of a reality of identity and place. The historically contingent place is thereby appropriated for political projects of producing the self and the other.

Imagining place as bordered is so thoroughly ingrained in the minds of modern individuals that its historical contingency and modernity is often inconceivable to many. The nation-space is the most important and obvious example. To the nation or nationalist, the border is a sacred space without which imagining the nation becomes impossible. But the border space has always been a contested space, inherently

[54] The captured rebels of Jamatiya rebellion (1862), and the Reang uprising (1943) were either killed or forced to accept Hinduism. Rebellion usually takes place for social, economic or political reason; the end result is always imposition or marking of their bodies as Hindus. For example see Pradip Nath Bhattacharjee.1983. *The Jamatiyas of Tripura,* Directorate of Research, Department of Welfare for Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes, Government of Tripura, p.45

ódisjunctô and arbitrary imposition to those who inhabit it. This is true even for a place of smaller scale. One would be surprised how the seemingly natural discontinuous ethnic-spaces in present northeast India is in fact intimately contested within and without. One would often overlook its production: how dominant groups invest in its production which must be continuously articulated and asserted.

For the ethno-nationalists in Tripura, the border between modern Tripura and Bangladesh has always existed, because without its existence it becomes impossible to imagine the other, the Bengalee as outsider. But the ethno-nationalist imagination simultaneously erases this border in order to produce a glorious antiquity of great and vast expanding kingdom, a place on which modern identity can be sculpted. The anthem of Twipra Students Federation, an ethno-nationalist student group make claims over vast region in the present day northeast as part of their former great kingdom. The map above and this anthem share similar mistake of projecting modern space onto premodern spatial arrangement.

Tipperah, if the early part of the Rajmala is any proof, has to be seen as a moving place before its establishment of capital at Rangamati (later Udaipur) in the Fourteenth century. Prior to its sway over large tracts of alluvial plains, later known as Chaklaroshanabad, and control over large group of Bengalees with knowledge and technology of plough cultivation and hierarchical socio-religious system (essential for building premodern state) various chiefs or wannabe rulers have attempted and failed to built a state. It is not altogether improbable that in these unsuccessful state-making attempts fixed-farm agriculture existed, either as imposed or voluntary. The absence of a hierarchical socio-religious system affected the state-making attempts, as the

wannabe rulers failed to keep required man power, loyal to the political elites, at its disposal whose surplus produce it could extract. In premodern spatial arrangement, where identities are pliable[55] and easy to thwart any attempt to rule, absence of hierarchical socio-religious system informed state-making failure.

An identifiable stable place Tipperah did not or could not exist. It was a place on move, always shifting in competition with other chiefs or wannabe rulers (especially other Bodo chiefs) for man-power and space.[56] Man-power was the rarest commodity. Even after the emergence of a relatively stable political centre at a stable place Tipperahôs hill subjects constantly dwindled.

Moving, absconding and state-evading hill tribes have been a constant pre-occupation for the Tipperah and other premodern state. Hill tribes inhabiting the Burma controlled Arrakan region, and also tribes inhabiting Tipperah controlled hills, has constantly moved into Chittagong hill tracts.[57] T H Lewin found ófour clans of Tipperah tribesô, namely ópooran Tipperah, Nowuttea, Osuie and the Reangô who claimed themselves as formerly Tipperas. The migration of formerly Tipperas from Hill Tipperah is seen by Lewin as outcome of forced Hinduisation.[58] These migrations should also bee seen as attempts to evade tax and rule which are connected with state-making. By the beginning of Nineteenth century, when Tipperah and the British-India

[55] Identities are still pliable in the region. See M S Prabhakara*, Invention and reinvention of ethnicity*, The Hindu, January 4, 2010, Hyderabad.
[56] Other chiefs which belong to the Bodo group are Bodos, Kacharis, Dimasa who built similar state form in the region. Tipperah Rajas and Dimasa Rajas were believed to be related by blood and marriage alliances. These three groups share linguistic similarity.
[57] T H Lewin.1984. *Wild Races of The Eastern Frontier of India*, Mittal Publications: Delhi, p.82. (Originally published in 1870 by W H Allen & Co: London)
[58] T H Lewin, *Wild Races of The Eastern Frontiers of India,* p.199.

were engaged in battle for mapping each otherôs domain, hill communities were still crossing colonially defined, demarcated territories.

Tipperah, before colonisation of the region by British-India, has to be seen as occupying three spaces: mobile hill space, state-space, and contested extractive space. The hilly terrains adjacent to the state-space constituted the mobile hill space; state-space was the core of the state on the foothill from where the religious and political elites controlled the extractive space; and the extractive space was the vast alluvial plain which produced surplus paddy absorbed by the state-core. These three spaces were connected though multiple plexus and made possible for the existence of tiny mimetic (Indic) states in the hills. Instead of viewing precolonial Tipperah as defined by an expanding/contracting boundary where the state exercised sovereignty over territorial subjects, it makes more sense to view Tipperah as a borderless place.

The mobile hill space was characterised by existence of multiple social realities. The hills around the state-core were inhabited by Tipperas who were relatively stable, recognised overlordship of the king, and incorporated certain Indic (read Hindu) cosmological outlook. A Tippera can become fully incorporated into the Indic cosmography in the state-centre and lose his/her identity. This incorporation or adaptation into religious-political order of the state-core is conceptualised as civilisation.[59] However, the movement is not unidirectional. There were numerous instances of kokborok speaking groups, as discussed above, moving away from the relatively stable settlements adjacent to the state-centre and becoming one with the wild.

[59] Similar narrative is still being employed in the postcolonial era. Hinduisation of the ótribalô is conceptualised as upward movement of education and civilisation, see Dr. Dwijendra Lal Bhowmik, *Tribal Religion of Tripura: A Socio-Religious Analysis*, p.21.

The mobile hill space was also a space of refuge for the political elites. Non-compliance to Mughal power by a Tipperah ruler would entail, almost always, ransacking of the capital at Udaipur. The political elites would react by escaping into the higher hills, covered with impenetrable forest, and evade capture. An ousted ruler would then try to raise mercenaries of hill population and re-negotiate with the invading superior might. In most cases, the Mughal authority would re-assert their authority over Tipperah and reinstate the offending ruler or one of his kin on condition of annual supply of elephants. The hills were zones of refuge not only for groups attempting to evade premodern Tipperah state, but also for the political elites of Tipperah from superior state.

In this chapter, my attempt has been to portray a view of space or a view of Tipperah. Indigenous premodern political space of the region comprised of territory, boundary, borders, and frontier which were unmapped, unmarked and undefined. Often the various kingdoms acknowledge each otherôs control over certain terrain or hills without having any control over communities inhabiting that particular frontier or territory, nor the tribes inhabiting it recognising any overlordship. Overlapping or multiple sovereignties were common, where small tribes recognised no sovereign authority nor subjected to rule by any kingdom, except the tribe head or chieftain. Tipperah rulers could fight over plains of present day Bangladesh, sometimes controlling it and sometimes losing it, with the Arrakans, Burmans and later Mughals without any control over various tribes inhabiting the border region in-between. Moreover, the Tipperas who regarded themselves as subjects of Tipperah inhabited

parts of present day Chittagong Hill Tracts simulataneously with Arakanees who did not recognise Tipperah Kings.

The British moved into the region in the Eighteen century, bringing with them new geography and technology of mapping. Imperial ideology and colonial rationality required mapping of the region. The imperial cartography displaced indigenous lived and shared spaces in these formerly ôblank spacesô. The next chapter will be about the mapping of this ôblank spaceô in the imperial map. My attempt will be to argue that imagining of postcolonial Tripura as homeland is impossible outside this imperial map.

Chapter III

Producing ôHill Tipperahô

In the meantime, however, Cairo and Mecca were beginning to be visualized in a strange new ways, no longer simply as sites in a sacred Muslim geography, but also as dots on paper sheets which included dots for Paris, Moscow, Manila and Caracas; and the plain relationship between these indifferently profane and sacred dots was determined nothing beyond the mathematically calculated flight of the crow. The Mercatorian map, brought in by the European colonizers, was beginning, via print, to shape the imagination of the Southeast Asians.[1]

One of the primary technologies of colonial control is the map. A mapped space supposes exclusion, inclusion, possession, control, and legitimates exploitation. The ódesire for powerô is deeply implicated in the desire óto make territory exclusive and map itô.[2] Maps also aims to produce rigid, fixed, arbitrary places suited to techniques of modernity in place of premodern ambivalent, ambiguous spaces. Maps fix communities to fixed, bounded, closed spaces. This chapter analyses the spatial history of óTripuraô during the colonial period. Instead of giving prehistoric mythical identity to the place óTripuraô, I shift the focus on coloniality and cartography: mapping as one of the instruments in the construction of modern óTripuraô. Colonial cartography and colonial superior power constitute two inseparable modern identity determinants inherently implicated in the displacement of premodern indigenous spaces in the Northeast India. Colonial practice of inscription of place-names as óKhasi Hillsô, óJaintia Hillsô, óGaro Hillsô, óCachar Hillsô, óTipperah Hillsô etcé were complicit in the colonial project of constructing fixed identities and places as rigid differentiated blocks on the colonial map. This chapter explores the colonial technique of spatial construction of colonised places surrounding ôHill Tipperahô. Thereby disrupting old indigenous spaces and producing a new notion of Tipperah.

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[1] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* pp.170-171.
[2] Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped,* op cit. p.126.

The discourse on modern ethnic identities in the northeast is premised on their ógivennessô and the corresponding rigid discontinuous geographical blocks as coterminous with the ethnic boundaries.[3] There are those who consider these boundaries and borders as arbitrary legacy of British-India colonial period which needs erasure or rectification if the ethnic problems of the region are to be resolved. Such simplistic views of colonial geography merely construe boundary disputes as problems of border relation between states and communities. Borders and border relations are after to the concept of border and boundary, contingent upon spatial ideology and spatial practice of distinct communities. Instead of viewing boundary disputes as problems of border relation between states and communities, this study views it as conflict of spatial ideologies, spatial practice and spatial organisation. It examines the nature of space and problems related with the changing nature of space. In this chapter, I propose to argue that the British-India colonial organisation of space and the construction of ethnic identities were inseparable.

In this chapter, I try to show how present day Tripura as óHill Tipperahô have been discursively constructed in the late eighteen and twentieth century as a result of British-India colonial spatial practices. By this, I do not conclude that history began with the coming of colonial power, prior to which it was a óblank spaceô waiting for the colonial to come and fill up with history. The task is to show how British-India colonial spatial practices, implicated in the imperial design and ideology, displaced

[3] The margins of all disparate geographical boundaries in the Northeast India are contested sites between different states. For example, the border region between Tripura and Mizoram is inhabited by Reangs and Mizos (considerably large population of Mizos still live in Bangladesh and Myanmar) along with other Kuki groups. The isomorphism claimed by ethno-nationalists of the region disappears when the margins are subjected to scrutiny.

indigenous conception and practice of space and imposed certain notion of space which became a contested ôhomelandô in the mid twentieth century.

Map and Place

Tripura today is a part of northeast region of India; a mapped place in the global map. A place with a distinct place-name, with identifiable group of people and well demarcated borders and boundaries ï at least it appears so on the map. In a global map of nations and national boundaries, it is difficult, almost impossible, to locate Tripura outside a national and regional map. However, looking at this reality ï each place within fixed, discontinuous, rigid national geography having sovereign and exclusive control over it ï from the margin of the place shatters this comfortable conception of space, place, national geography and maps.[4] Lines of demarcation on the map do not demarcate place and lived spaces of communities.

For example, the boundary between Tripura (India) and Bangladesh appears as well defined on the map, but viewed from the position of lived spaces of people on these margins multiple social and political realities surfaces. As argued by Yhome, ñthat 'national effect' and 'state control' were always fragile in the margins. The 'disjunction' was never absent in the margins, and the 'isomorphism' was never present that can be disjuncted in the face of globalization. In the margins, then, questions of 'nationhood', 'identity', 'citizenship', 'legitimacy' and 'loyalty' were always contested and blurred.ò[5] Therefore, there is a need to recognise that boundaries, borders and geography of

[4] As David Ludden points out that other perspectives of places and regions, different from the one inscribed by maps, do exist. See Ludden, *Where is Assam?* op cit.
[5] Kekhreisituo Yhome.2007. *Politics of Region: The Making of Naga Identity during Colonial and Postcolonial Era*, Borderland <http:/www.borderlands.net.au/vo16no3_2007/yhome_region.htm> (accessed February 12, 2008).

place are never given, but are contingent upon the dominant spatial arrangement imposed by dominant power.

In order to understand place and identity one must start by asking: how has this place become what it has become? What are the historical, political and geographical factors which produced this particular place? Instead of taking present geography of Tripura in an unquestioned conventional way, I subject the geography of this place to cartographic deconstruction. To do this, it is important to consider all modern maps as political in nature. David Ludden opines that, territorial boundaries ï as well as social efforts to define, enforce and reshape them ï represent political projects rather than simple facts. The makers and enforcers of boundaries use maps to define human reality inside national territory. As a result, everything in the world has acquired a national identity. We see boundaries of national states so often that they almost appear to be natural feature of the globe. [6]

Maps also allow or facilitate possession. As such maps are not what cartographers say it is ï scientific or objective form of knowledge ï but they are product of certain spatial practice and ideologies deeply implicated in the process of control, exclusion and exploitation. British-India colonial cartographic construction of the region and regions elsewhere conferred on it the power to own and rule. Maps did not represent reality but produced reality as conceived by the dominant forms of power. Once maps becomes published texts, lines on it acquire authority gaining authoritarian image and even reinforce and legitimate status quo or may even become agents of change. But it

[6] David Ludden, *Political Maps and Cultural Boundaries, op cit.*

is never neutral.[7] Maps are partisan assertion about the nature of space, deployed to subject space to particular political and commercial interests, and as Bateson puts it, ôthe map is not a territory but their place in itô.[8] Maps are contingent on the cultural, social and political desires of its producers. Deconstructing the maps allow us to accept the indeterminacy and contingency of boundaries, borders, regionality, and territoriality. In this chapter, I take map, as the text to be problematised and deconstructed in my project of challenging the primordial and givenness of Tripura and study how the colonial cartography constructed present day Tripura.

The technology of map and map making has been fundamental to colonialism, expansion and imperialism of the west. Map was the instrument through which European explorers and settlers translated the landscapes into objects to be comprehended, colonised and consumed. Maps are not mere representation of space. As Thongchai puts it,

> In terms of most communication theories and common sense, a map is a scientific abstraction of reality. A map merely represents something which already exists objectively óthereô. In the history I have described, this relationship was reversed. A map anticipated spatial reality, not vice versa. In other words, a map was model for, rather than a model of, what it purported to represent. [9]

Maps produce place and locations, borders and boundaries of people inhabiting it. Mapping a place with marked borders facilitates ownership, inclusion, exclusion and control. Colonial power conceptualised space differently from the indigenous people they colonised in the present day northeast India, and in the process displaced indigenous spaces. The construction of Tripuri as a political identity was contingent

[7] See J B Harley, *Deconstructing the Map, op cit.*
[8] Quoted in Robert Paineôs, *Aboriginality, Authenticity and the Settler's World*, p.104.
[9] Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped*, p.110.

on colonial cartographic construction of place óHill Tipperahô. Before this cartographic exercise, Tipperah as a homeland of any particular community do not constitute a meaningful reference.

Inventing óHill Tipperahô

Tipperah, as articulated in the previous chapter, has to be seen as occupying three spaces: mobile hill space, state-core, and contested extractive space. The hilly terrains adjacent to the state-space constituted the mobile hill space; state-core was the fortified capital on the foothill from where religious and political elites controlled the extractive space; and extractive space was the vast alluvial plain which produced surplus grain to be appropriated by political and religious elites at the state-core. This Manikyan indigenous spatial arrangement was subjected to disjunction in 1761 when the combined power of East India Company and Nawab of Bengal defeated Tipperah and established full control over the entire alluvia plain. The hills were of no economic importance to colonial imagination. The British officer dispatched to ósubdueô Tipperah ruler and óend his territorial ambitionsô sent this report.

> The paying part of Tipperah lay on the plains, and appeared in the Mahomedan revenue roll as pergunnah Roshanabad. For this of course a settlement was made. We found it a Zamindari, as such we treated it. But of the barren hills that fenced it on the east we took no cognizance. Covered with jungles and inhabited by tribes of whom nothing was known, save that they were uncouth in speech and not particular as to clothing, the hills were looked upon as something apart. The Rajah claimed to exercise authority within them, but did not, as it seemed, derived much profit from them.[10]

[10] Mackenzie (1884) quoting the report of the officer of East India company dispatched to help the Mughal forces subdue Tipperah Rajah in 1761. Alexander Mackenzie.1884.*The Northeast Frontier of India,* p.272.

Three important implications of this disjunction may be pointed out. First, the extractive region acquired new identities and ambitions. The alluvial plain of Bengal, as a strategic extractive region, has been politically connected and culturally important to the Tipperah state-core but its cultural connection to the hill populations was insignificant. Tipperah state was constructed around a cultural core within which Hill-ness and Plain-ness merged and precariously sustained the Tipperah state. The disjunction changed the meaning of Tipperahôs connection to it. The alluvial plain as a region within the colony, Tipperahôs control over it was mediated by colonial rationality. Second, this new identity and ambitions introduced a complex political arrangement. While the Tipperah ruler paid zamindary tax to the East India Company for its rule over the alluvial plain, he was considered independent and sovereign within the hills.

Third, the disjunction inflicted a permanent surgery on the Manikyan spatial arrangement, the indigenous interconnected spaces. Colonial imagination of óhillsô as non-productive, and disconnected to the valley below worked in queer ways to fashioned its inhabitants as wild, uncouth and uncivilised. In the colonial imagination, the mountainous terrains, within which Tipperah was believed to be sovereign was the geography of the unknown (Figure 3.1). The hills, jungles and óunknown tribesô, in the colonial imagination, created geographical lines between what is known and unknown. As long the hills were seen as financially sterile these places were perceived as realms of the unknown.

This take-over of the alluvial plain by the East India Company constituted a major disruption of the older spaces of interconnection between state-core, hills and extractive plains. The linkages between hills and valleys snapped as the English imposed new laws to regulate the linkages. The alluvial plains acquired strange and ambiguous territorial identity and ambitions. However the 1826 war with Burma and the ôunintentionalô annexation of Assam forced a new imagination of the hills.

Figure 3.1 Tipperah and other places of present day northeast region were visualised in the colonial map as ôblankô in the early colonial map of the region. [Part of a map titled ñEast India Companyôs Map of Indiaò by Aaron Arowsmith, 1804 (source Susan Gole. 1984. A Series of Early Printed Maps of India in Facsimile, Jayaprints: New Delhi, No. 52b)]

The discovery of ôteaô in Assam had brought about a changed in the colonial imagination of Assam: from profitless jungle to land of smiling cultivation. The extension of tea cultivation into the hills brought the English in confrontation with

their little known ówildô, inhabiting the still ôblank spacesô on their map. Similar confrontations were already besieging the colonial administrators on its other Bengal frontier, the Chittagong region.[11] The second half of nineteenth century was a history of raids by hill inhabitants on British subjects and violent English expeditions into the hills to subdue and colonise the ówildô tribes. These relationships became the framework for defining, rather construction of óHill Tipperahô. In this chapter I will articulate this argument on two fronts: one, the production of the notion of distinct ówild tribesô on the marches; second, the production of the notion of home or place as rigid bounded geography.

After the take-over of alluvial plains from the Nawab of Bengal and confining Tipperah ruler to the hills, the objective was to convert the region into commercially profitable. It faced two problems. First, no matter how much tax was imposed, profit from the region remained negligible. Second, the alluvial plains faced chronic flood. In order to overcome these problems a combined enterprise of British superior power and Bengalee landlords forcibly annexed/occupied low lands and pushed the Khasis, Jaintias, Cacharis and Tipperas further into the hills which the colonial power named after each tribe.[12]

The Cachari ruler and Tipperah ruler were easily subdued.[13] The Jaintias and Khasis resisted in the hills, banned from trading in British held territories and enclosed within colonial designated territories of óKhasi Hillsô and óJaintia Hillsô. However, the real

[11] According to Mackenzie, of the hill Tipperah almost nothing was known about the geography and its inhabitants. Records of the region were blank, except of the revenue payments by some motley collection of local chiefs. During the earlier raids by the Shindu tribes various plans to send expeditions were abandoned as óimpracticableô and the geography óso hostileô and óso unknownô, *The Northeast Frontier of India*, pp.329 -365.
[12] David Ludden, *Political territories and cultural territories*, op cit.
[13] Similary the Ahom (Assam) and the Manipur kingdoms were subdued without any resistance.

danger to colonial rule came from tribes inhabiting the hills between Tipperah, Cachar and Manipur, and Chittagong Hill Tracts. From these impenetrable hills, ówildô and ósavageô tribes carried out raids into British held territories (discussed in the next section).

Marking hills and colonising the ówildô

Historically, British-Indiaôs colonisation project in the northeast frontier centred on erasure of non-state spaces, rather than a long-drawn out battle with few mimetic states. These states were annexed to the British-India Empire without any resistances by the ruling elites. Resistance to colonial rule came from the ówildô mobile ótribesô inhabiting the spaces between these mimetic states. In order to colonise these ówildô tribes, the in-between spaces had to be rendered geographically legible. This objective was made possible by imagining the wild tribes as distinct communities and subsequently fixing them inside colonial produced geographies.

My subject is the ówildô marches, between Cachar, Manipur and Tipperah and the borderlands between newly produced territories of óHill Tipperahô and óBritish Tipperahô. As argued above, a new boundary was produced when East India Companyôs officials differentiated and imposed new definition of óHill Tipperahô and óPlain Tipperahô in 1761. Plain Tipperah was recognised as Companyôs territory by virtue of its succession from the Nawab of Bengal, and the Hill Tipperah was assumed to be óindependentô territory of the Tipperah raja within which his ósovereigntyô was recognised. The ruling elites of Tipperah were severed from direct control over its historically surplus producing region. The old geographical arrangement was altered with the introduction of this new spatial imagination.

This new geographical arrangement, i.e. the creation of new boundary between hills and plains, engendered new problems for both British and Tipperah. The notion of ôHill Tipperahô was new, ambiguous and constituted problematic spatial inference. The higher altitude hills between Cachar, Manipur and Tipperah were non-state spaces, whose inhabitants have never acknowledged overlordship of any of these states.[14] An identifiable territorial entity to be designated as ôHill Tipperahô was absent. Secondly, the hill ranges between Tipperah, Bengal and Burma were inhabited by numerous groups of people, including Tipperas who acknowledged overlordship of the Tipperah king. In this complex spatial arrangement Tipperah ruler was required to exercise ósovereigntyô in the manner conceptualised by the colonial power. Sovereignty can become workable only when identifiable territory emerges and citizenship or notion of ósubjectô has been fixed or territorialized.

ôHill Tipperahô as a place becomes a site of struggle between British and Tipperah. Both employed different spatial strategies to imposed and counter the other spatial ideologies. While Tipperah ruler relied on anachronistic logic of órulers since time immemorialô, lacking in administrative wherewithal and military power; the coloniser relied on extensive use of documents and maps which when absent was backed by superior military fire power. However, before the colonial power could produce a new spatial order, the marches have to be made geographically legible. Without legibility,

[14] In fact the territory which is now called ôMizoramô was initially considered to belong to Tipperah. However after colonial military expedition in 1872 (to punish the Kookies for attacking tea plantations in Cachar Hills) into these mountainous terrain, the English realised that Tipperah never claimed jurisdiction over these hills. The discussion on the reports sent by the expedition party concluded that, since the territory did not belonged to the local Rajas (Cachar, Manipur and Tipperah), óthis Lushai country lying between eastern boundary of Hill Tipperah and Burmese frontier belonged to Englandô. Major MacDonald, Caption Tanner and Caption Badley, ñThe Lushai Expeditionò, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London,* Vol. 17, No. 1 (1872-1873), p.54 (accessed June 02, 2008).

the possibility for a contending power to alter the lines on the physical geography always exists. Therefore, the first task was to conduct survey and map the region and inscribe its power over it by putting concrete, visible marks on hills, valleys, riverbanks and uplands.

The history of map-making in the region offers quite a queer story. While the established centres of power objected to cartographic surgery by merely complaining to the colonizers; the ówildô únrulyô savagesô resisted colonisation, leading to brutal warfare through out nineteenth century. Instead of relying on visible markers on the landscapes to be enough indicators of its power, British-India marched its troops into the heart of the Lushai villages and ravaged the villages of ónemyô, Lushai chiefs.[15] British-India officially created a new named ñLushai Hillò and marched its troops into it to subdue the newly designated Lushai tribes.

> The frontier of Sylhet and Cachar towards the Lushai Hills is so extended that no number of outposts would render raids impossible. Marching from the village of sailenpui west of the Daleswari river to the borders of hill Tipperah, a journey of ten days, not a single Lushai village would be seen; and when we consider the facility with which the Lushai move through the jungle independent of paths, it is surprising that the frontier tea gardens have so long enjoyed immunity from raids. The history of Sibsagar frontier clearly demonstrated that the only successful method of preventing Naga incursions was to obtain thorough control over this tribe by establishing posts in the heart of the country, and creating a fringe of semi-civilised tribes along the border, which acted as buffer to the more remote and turbulent ones.[16]

[15] After defeating a Lushai chief in 1892 McCabe, who was stationed at Aijal, called other Lushai chiefs and pointed out to the óblackened site of the defeated chiefs village and the únion jack floating over itô to warn of similar fate in case any one contemplated on resisting the might of British-India. Rupak Debnath (ed).2008. *McCabe's Report on Eastern Lushai Rising, 1892*, Kreativemind: Kolkata, p.23.
[16] Ibid, pp.26-27.

The creation of óLushai Hillsô delimited the territorial reach/claim of Tipperah, Manipur and Cachar. Once this place have been produced it became easier to locate, fix and identify people and place in order to control and subject them to colonial objectives. In similar fashion, geographically illegible marches between existing states and new territorial entities were made legible ï by naming and mapping places and people. The frontier region of shifting borders between premodern states in the region were erased and colonised by marking hills with pillars, hoisting union jack at burnt down villages, and inscribing Christian markers in order to differentiate them from the mimetic Hindu states.

Cartographic Construction of óHill Tipperahô

Knowledge of cartography and the technology of mapping have been inevitably associated with imperialism and colonialism of the west. In the imperial scheme of things the world was full of óblank spacesô, on the imperial maps, to be discovered and filled in. Unexplored places to be discovered and inscribed on imperial map and plot the entire globe on its map. The desire for geographical knowledge and map making was integral part of colonial acquisition and expansion.[17]

The desire for a marked boundary between óHill Tipperahô and British-India arose from two conditions. One, British-India coveted flood-free uplands and to settled ólowlandersô, read Bengalee peasants, there.[18] On its part, Tipperah ruler, severed from its surplus producing plains, coveted these uplands adjacent to its capital so as to recreate/increase its source of revenue. Two, as indicated above, British-Indiaôs

[17] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, pp.216-219.
[18] Mackenzie, *The Northeast Frontier,* p.278.

upward push for land brought down hordes of angry ótribesô on its frontier towns and markets. Tipperah ruler neither possessed the fire power nor the willingness to rein in these óraiding tribesô. Therefore, British-India took upon itself the task of making them ógovernableô. To do this, the colonialist had to imagine a new hill named ñLushai Hillò and separate it from ñHill Tipperahò. However, since Mughal and former rulers of Tipperah have never defined each otherôs sphere of influence and it was not known where territorial sovereignty (a term unknown to these states) of Cachar, Tipperah and Manipur ended (which were in fact overlapping), a proposed boundary could be anywhere.[19] A boundary, in actual sense, was where British-India said it is.

The need for marked boundary became utmost importance to the British by the beginning of nineteenth century. Mackenzie wrote,

> In 1809, on the Sylhet frontier, a bitter enmity subsisted between the land owners of the plains and the Rajahôs people. Every outlaying hills was claimed as belonging to the Rajah. Small properties were bought by him at auction or by private contract, and occupied by bands of armed Tipperahs, who bullied their Bengali neighbours and produced a state of terrorism now-a-days unknown. The government had to interpose in the most determined manner, and one or two resolute magistrates soon restored order. In 1819 things had again come to a crisis. The chronic irritation subsisting between the hill Tipperahs and the outer kookies led to frequent depredations, in which British villages were sacked and plundered, and orders were at last given for laying down a definite and easily recognisable boundary which would enable government to fix upon the Rajah the responsibility of keeping order in his own markets, and preventing the passage of marauders to the defenceless plains.[20]

[19] As Thongchai writes, ón a situation where the sphere of influence of both sides have never been defined and in fact were overlapping, a modern boundary could be any where in those marginals ï in every sense of the word ï areas. A proposed boundary therefore was a speculation which, depending on oneôs point of view, was equally truer and falser than another proposal. In actual practice, the survey of an area by one side done alongside the military advance. The military decided the extent of territorial sovereignty and provided the authority under which mapping could be executed, not vice versa. Force defined the space. Mapping vindicated itô, *Siam Mapped,* p.126.
[20] Mackenzie, The Northeast Frontier of India, p.278.

Although it is unclear as to why ókookiesô confrontation with Tipperah would culminate in their raiding of British territories and subjects, these raids unsettled the claims of authority on the hills by Tipperah. British-India sent in surveyors, cartographers and missionaries into the hills to determine ónaturalô boundary between British-India and Tipperah. This cartographic surgeries forced final disjunction in the indigenous spatial arrangement. It produced new boundaries on the hill, and new enclosed hill populations. Within this newly enclosed geography British-India invested its military, ideological and religious might to flatten the hitherto ungoverned geography and people.

Lt. Fisher was the first surveyor to be assigned the task of mapping the region between óIndependent Tipperahô and British District of Sylhet in 1819. Fisherôs task was to lay down the northern boundary of the (Tipperah) state and make it coextensive with the southern boundary line of Sylhet. He carried the boundary line up to Dalleshwar River which became the eastern boundary between Sylhet and Tipperah.[21] The ówant of well defined boundaryô, as Fisher puts it, was that in the un-assessed region óthe soil was rich and fertile producing abundance of grains chiefly rice, culic, linseed, til, and sursoya, fruits and vegetablesô.[22] Fisher noted that the various act of óexacting tribute or customô by Tipperah Raja, ófrom inhabitant of the plain who visit the hills for the purpose of cutting woods, grass, and bamboo etc.., for

[21] Sahadev Bikram Kishore Debbarman (compiled).2002. *Tripura State Eastern Boundary Dispute*, Twipra Historical Society:Agartala, p.6. Also Lt. Thomas Fisher, ñA Report on the Boundary Dispute Between British Frontier of District Sylhet and the Independent Territory of Tiperahò, *Tripura Historical Documents* (compiled by Sahadev Bikram Kishore Debbarman and Jagadish Gan-Chaudhuri, Firma Kim: Calcutta, 1994), pp.20-29.
[22] Lt. Thomas Fisher, Ibid.

house building or of trafficking with hill subjectsô were óserious evilsô.[23] In another instance, Fisher argued that the claim of Tipperah raja over low lands adjacent to the hills was inconsistence with idea of óIndependent hill Tripuraô. In his opinion óextensive jungalvallies lying between different chains of hills which probably stretch many miles to southward of the cultivated country are considered by the raja as part of Independent hill territory but it is submitted that the Independent state of raja of Tipperah has always been understood to include the hills only (sic)ô.[24] Fisherôs Lineô cut off large tracts of cultivable jungles and rivers and plains from the control of Raja of Tipperah. Tipperah refused to accept óFisherôs lineô.[25]

Fisherôs Line legitimatised British control over large tracts of upland (which was found to be suitable for tea and cotton cultivation) previously imagined as constituting óHill Tipperahô. However in the new colonial spatial rationality, the claim of the Rajah of Tipperah over these uplands protruding from óHill Tipperahô was óinconsistent with the notion of óHill Tipperahô. Superior military might determined where boundary line was to be fixed, and then mapped. The fixing of this particular boundary was followed by series of raids by Lushai tribes into British territories. The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of Lushai raids into British territories and British punitive expeditions into what came to be known in colonial discourse as óLushai countryô.

In 1849 a new Arbitration was arranged to resolve boundary disputes between British-India and Tipperah, including the unresolved Fisherôs line. British government appointed G U Yule as their arbitrator and Campbell was named arbitrator for

[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Bikram Kishore Debbarman, *Tripura State Eastern Boundary Dispute*, p.6.

Tipperah. An English Planter from Mymensingh, Mr. Coull was designated as the Referee in the Arbitration. The controversy over the control of a strategic river, Feni or Fenny, lying between the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Independent Tipperah is illustrative of the power of modern geographical discourse. The then Raja of Tipperah claimed full control of the river on the ground that former rulers of his state controlled the region prior to the Mughals. However, Isan Chandra Manikya (then Raja of Tipperah) was asked to provide proofs of his dominion over the river, which in the words of then Secretary to the Government of Bengal, consisted in "evidence of a map". Map as a technology of control constituted ultimate evidentiary picture. The burden of proof was on the Tipperah king, not the British.

On the part of British-India, their right over Feni river was a natural succession to the Mughals from whom they acquired the region. In the words of the then Secretary (Government of Bengal), "it is not impossible that the ancient Tipperah Rajas might have possessed both sides of the Fenny, but it does not appear to be known. It is known, however, that when the District of Chittagong was taken possession by the Moghul dynasty, in the year 1666, it was under the dominion of the Arrakanees, and there is not the slightest reason to suppose that the Arrakanees whom we represent, had left exclusive dominion of the boundary river to their rivals, the Tipperah Hindoos".[26]

Marking boundaries on the undefined ambiguous margins required extensive justification, recorded in official correspondence, maps and other texts. Most importantly, force or the capacity to inflict superior force at ones disposal was the

[26] Letter to the Commissioner of Chittagong Division from the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, May 25, 1850, *Tripura Historical Documents*, pp.38-40.

actual arbiter of boundary. As Thongchai puts it, ña proposed boundary therefore was a speculation which, depending on ones own view, was equally truer and falser than another proposal. Force decided the extent of territorial sovereignty and provided the authority under which mapping could be executed, not vice versa. Force defined the space. Mapping vindicated it.ò[27] Without military force, its application or threat of application, mapping alone was inadequate to claim a legitimate space. But the legitimation of the boundary was always substantiated by a map.

Mapping and superior force became a single set of mutually reinforcing technology to exercise power over space in order to define ôHill Tipperahô, ôLushai Hillô and ôBritish Tipperahô. Hill Tipperah could only remain ôindependentô when its boundaries are defined on the map. But this boundary and the map of it cannot be decided and marked on the map by Independent Tipperah. It required legitimation by superior force. Superior power decided which claims of the inferior power were justified and which proofs are accepted. The burden of providing proofs or evidences over the claimed territories was on Tipperah. British-India was not required to provide proofs that the territories did not belong to the British. It could possess for itself, and dispossess others of territories by drawing a line on the map.

Tipperah had showed two documents in support of claim of the disputed territories to the British arbitrator and the Referee. The documents were dated 1672 and 1750. The first one was a proceeding of agreement between the Moghul officers and Tipperah Raja defining the line of boundary, and the other document was an agreement on the boundary signed by a representative of Tipperah. Yule sidelined these documents as

[27] The relationship between military power and mapping received considerable importance in Winichakulôs *Siam Mapped: A history of the Geo-body of a Nation*, p.125-127

insufficient and the authenticity of which were doubtful. In his opinion, both the documents were forged and thereby unimportant. Another proof given by the representative of Tipperah was the existence of ruined palaces, and custom posts of the former rulers of the Manikya dynasty. Yule conceded that, these ruins of palaces of the former Manikya rulers did exist in the disputed land. However, in his opinion, these ruins were of óthree century oldô and were destroyed by the Moghuls who ousted the Tipperah Rajas from the disputed territory. Moreover, merely the existence of custom posts or houses did not entitle Tipperah to the disputed territory as it was a habit of the Rajas to set up ópetty custom houses insideô others territories.[28] Yule retained Fisherôs Line and re-marked the boundary where the lines were blur and unidentifiable. The accusation was that, representatives of the Raja had misled Fisher and did not provide correct names of some of the rivers and hills and valleys. The new boundary retained Fisherôs Line and added to British dominion these places and rivers: Thal, Murai, Dingai and Manu; Chata-Chura, Patharia, Saragraj hills; and Pharwa Dharmangar valley. British-India established posts along this line and inscribed its power onto the landscapes ï its conception of Hill Tipperah.

Establishment of British posts, despite Tipperahôs objection and disagreement, reflected British attitude towards the Rajah of Tipperah and óindependentô status of Tipperah. Its independence was secured only as long as British were allowed to resolve dispute without force. The Arbitration Referee, Mr. James Coullôs letter is a clear indication of the attitude with which British-India desired the boundary to be settled.

[28] Northern Boundary Report of Messrs Yule and Campbell, 1851, *Tripura Historical Documents* pp.42-64.

ñHaving most carefully considered the awards submitted to me by the arbitrators appointed by the Government of India and the Rajah of Tipperah, respectively, to settle the disputed boundary between Sylhet and Independent Tipperah. I am of opinion-

1. That the Rajah has failed to establish his right to the line claimed by him in the kamalpur Manik Bander case (No. 70-314. of the Civil Court), and accordingly award that the line laid down by Lieutenant Fisher in that portion of the disputed territory shall continue to be the boundary between the two states.
2. That in the Kailsahar case (No. 2832 of the Civil Court), the Rajah has proved his claim to the land lying on the left bank of the Manu as well as that on the right bank already given to him by the arbitrators, and award accordingly the line claimed by the Rajah through out the whole of this portion of the disputed territory be allowed and established as the boundary between the states, lieutenants Fisherôs line being set aside.
3. That in the Pharwa Dharmanagar case (No. 304 of the Civil Court), the Rajah has failed to establish his claim, and I therefore award that line laid down by Fisher be upheld continue to be boundary between the two states.
4. That in the Chandakani case (No. 378 of the Civil Court), the Rajah has also failed to establish claim set by him and I award accordingly that Fisherôs line shall be upheld and remain as the boundary between Sylhet and Independent Tipperahô.[29]

Boundaries were marked based on colonial rationality and legitimated based on possession of superior power. Yule in his report concludes, ó the portion of the country now finally decided to belong to the British Government consist of hills and plains, for the most parts covered with jungles and swamps. In the hills cotton is now grown, and its cultivation might be very much increased; the plains afford very fine crop rice, not liable to injury from inundations occasionally so ruinous to other parts of Sylhet, mustard, sugarcane, poppy and other fibrous plantsô.[30]

[29] *Tripura Historical Documents*, p.81.
[30] Ibid, p.54.

The new boundary did not resolve the dispute. Tipperah refused to cooperate with the British in securing the border and cut off correspondence with British officials. British-India decided to send another survey team in 1860 under the supervision of H J Reynolds. Reynolds reached Tipperah in May to redraw the boundary between British-India and Tipperah. Tipperah Rajah refused to cooperate and sent neither representative nor arbitrator. However Reynolds decided to survey the territory on his own.

Like his predecessors, he intended to search for a ónatural boundaryô between the two states, on the disputed land. When Reynolds started the survey in and around Simna and Tapta rivers in April 1861, about 200 kookies led by the Rajahôs officers stopped the survey team and ordered them to turn back. According to Reynoldsô account, Kookies had cut down trees, barricading survey path, and block the road óbrandishing their weapons and shouting *dohai'*. He demanded to know if the Rajah had sent them. He was answered in negative, but was told to stop work till the Rajah agreed to their progress. Most of his helpers, Coolies, had abandoned the survey party for fear of Kooki soldiers and Reynold had to stop survey midway and leave. The Rajah of Tipperah denied any knowledge of the Survey party being obstructed by his officers and Kooki soldiers. When he resumed the survey, Kookies were reluctant to help him guide through dense jungles and hills and denying knowledge of any stream or river or names of places mentioned by Fisher.

Reynolds report makes for an interesting reading of the peculiarities of map-making. According to him, when confronted with unhelpful, hostile inhabitants, he óprevailed upon a Kookee to act as guide to the Doopani Murra and I subsequently adopted as

the boundary the rout by which he led us thereé ..(t)he Cherra, or stream, which rises out of the eastern side of Doopani hills forms the boundary for some distance and then to avoid thick jungle and the winding of the cherra the line leaves the bed of the cherra and runs along a path skirting the cherra on the northern bank, in the same way as the boundary line adopted on the west bank of Doopani Murra, in this way a ónatural boundaryô was obtained for about two miles meeting the line which I had cut through the jungle from the south point of the Dholna and thus completing the connection of the boundary across the hillsô.[31] Apparently, a ónatural boundaryô was contingent upon the arbitrary definition of surveyors and circumstances prevailing in the geography to be surveyed. A ónatural boundaryô of Tipperah was what the British-India surveyors believed to be ónaturalô.

Reynolds effort to search for ónatural boundaryô was also abandoned mid way. Tipperah was unwilling to cooperate and the tribes inhabiting the region were hostile and refused to provide him names of rivers, streams and hills. While Reynolds was searching for ónaturalô boundaries on the hills inhabited by the Kukis, about five hundred Kukis made a sudden attacked on the plains controlled by British-India and parts of Tipperah. The raid was concentrated at Chagulneyah, where about fifteen villages were burnt, 185 British subjects were murdered and more than hundred taken captives.[32] The raid was so swift and unexpected that the British could react only after a year. By January 1861, British-India sent its army into the Lushai hill and attacked óRuton Polyaôsô (the chief suspected of spearheading the raid) village. The Kukis,

[31] Report of H J Reynoldôs, 1861 to the Secretary, Board of Revenue, Dacca, in *Tripura Historical Documents,* pp.87-98.
[32] Nalini Ranjan Roychoudhury.1976. ñKuki Disturbance in Tripura, 1860-1861ò, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 4, No. 9, April 1976, pp.60-65.

with the help of Reangs, retaliated by raiding Udaipur, the former capital of Tripura, killing one fifty people and took as many as two hundred captives.

In 1864 another attempt was made to resolve the dispute mutually. This time both Tipperah and British-India sent their arbitrators, Campbell (Tipperah) and T Jones (British). Campbell and Jones were assigned to mark the boundary from Khowai to Dharmanagar. Apparently both the arbitrators failed to garner help from the local inhabitants who showed ósullen hostilityô towards the surveyors and their coolies. Wooden posts and mud mounds constructed by the surveyors were destroyed as soon as they were out of sight. The surveys for defining boundary of Independent Tipperah ended with this survey. Masonry pillars were erected along the borders and lines drawn on the map.

Kuki raids into British territory and later Tipperah Rajaôs territory, and British-India military expeditions against them, in many ways brought to the fore the problems of colonial modern spatial organisation. British-India blamed Tipperah king, Ishan Manikya, for his failure to prevent raids by his wild subjectsô on the British subjects and at the same time demanded that the king protect his borders between óLushai Hillsô and óTipperah Hillsô. Steer, the Commissioner of Chittagong Hill Tracts, even went to the extent of threatening the Raja with invasion and loss of independent status. Tipperah king was compelled to pay a share of the compensation given to the victims of the raids. In order to reign in the raiding ósavageô British-India decided to fix a river (Langai) between Jampui and Haichak range as the Tipperahôs border and

Fig. 3.2. Geography of ôHill Tipperahô after colonial surveys and mapping (Source: Tripura Tribal Research Institute)

demanded Tipperah king to do something very strange.[33] He was asked to secure his border along the Jampui and Haichak ranges and prevent his ôunrestrained, ill-disposedô subjects, the Kukis, from entering into his territory from where they could raid the British territory and attacked British subjects. The Raja was required to guard his border to prevent the entry of his subjects inside his territory.

The Fisherôs line, the fixing of rivers Feni and later Langai as boundaries between British-India and Tipperah shaped modern Tripuraôs geography. It acquired a territorial identity, on the imperial map, where western geographical ideologies became applicable. It also acquired a geographical identity that can be used as site for modern identity construction. However, the category Tippera still inhabited a stigmatised space as indicated in the previous chapter. Before it could claim this new geographical entity as its homeland, it must disrupt the last remaining Manikyan spatial ideology ï the identity of the state-core. This will be discussed in chapter four.

The British had put lines on abstract maps and made the region geographically legible and readable to colonial enterprise, but old indigenous spaces still lingered on. The indigenous spaces of mobility where chiefs and tribes and Rajas recognise no marked boundaries still refused to be suppressed and erased. Lines on the map was not the reality, it sought to impose a reality, conceived by the coloniser. Lines on the map, that partitions hills, rivers and regions have yet to become lines of demarcated political identity; geographical lines have not yet become marker of social and cultural differentiation.

[33] The fixing of Langai river as Tipperahôs boundary during the expeditions against the Kookies became the bone of contention for the subsequent Tipperah Rajaôs till 1930. Tipperah Rajas were made to consider the boundary or inner line as provisional line which will be lifted after raiding kookies have been subdued.

By the beginning of twentieth century British have succeeded in completely reproducing the region on the map. Khasis, Jaintias, Lushais (Mizos), and Tripuris have been put, fixed inside territorially defined spaces of colonial inscribed places, ôKhasi hillô, ôJaintia hillô, ôLushai hillô, and ôTipperah hillsô. Tipperah came to be hemmed by British on three sides and the Lushais or Kukis on the one side, who were barred form entering into Tipperah and British territory.

Colonial Mapped Place as ôMy Landô

The map is a product of colonial imagination of space. More specifically, colonial power on the geography of the region produced mapped places as imagined and conceptualised by the imperial power. The map produced a discontinuous place which the Tipperah ruler can call ómy landô and the possibility of exercising sovereignty over it. The mapped place or the newly produced discontinuous and rigid geographical block was yet to become basis for production and circulation of a political identity, sculpted onto it. The ólinkô between newly produced identifiable territory and modern identity still deluded the new bounded subjects. The production of this ólinkô will be the subject of succeeding chapters.

The importance of geographical survey and map making, in order to exercise power over space or produce the conditions for sovereignty, assumed importance in the Manikya dynasty by the beginning of Twentieth century. Severed from its former extractive space, the dynasty faced twin tasks of converting the uplands into new

extractive space and to produce a map of its own dominion. These two objectives preoccupied the Tipperah till its dissolution.

The first objective was sought to be achieved from two perspectives: one, by wrestling from the Brititish as much control over valleys, river and uplands (low hills). In this project Tipperah rulers came into conflict with British over the control of uplands on the Sylhet frontier, control of trade on the Feni, and extensive valley lying between Lungai and Dalleshwar River. Two, the Tipperah rulers attempted to encourage, at times impose, fix farm agriculture on the hill people, which in most cases were resisted either through armed rebellion or age old practice of evading state. This particular problem prompted large scale settlement of Bengalees who are more amenable to fix farm agriculture.

The second objective, i.e. the production of map of its dominion or rule, was styled on the British. Tipperah hired Bengalee administrators (instead of Bengalee Brahmins), British cartographers and invested enormous sums in compiling the map of its newly produced territoriality. Simultaneously, it also carried out population census.[34] It may be pointed out that the period is filled with incessant out-flow of óhill peopleô and in-flow of óplain peopleô.[35] The difference between British mapping of ñLushai Hillô and Tipperahôs new found love for map was that, the former was predicated upon mapping a óLushai countryô distinguishable from Manipur, Cachar or Tipperah, while the later intended on producing an extractive hill space.

[34] Tipperah conducted a census in 1901 after it found the earlier census of 1881 inaccurate. Since then census was carried out every tenth year.
[35] This subject elicited considerable importance from the administrative point of view as evidence by a permanent section, óImmigration and Emigrationô, in the annual administration reports of the state since 1872-78.

The notion of Tipperah-as-nation space has not yet conceptualised by political elites. The political elites, instead, conceptualise itself as separate nation different from other nationality like Tipperah, Bengalee, Manipuri, Reang, or Lushai.[36] Neither the political elites, nor any other group have produced the ólinkô between a given identity and mapped place. Identity and place has not yet been cross-mapped onto each other. Despite the tacit acknowledgment of ñHill Tipperahô as home of ótipperasô in the colonial cartography, the political elites in Hill Tipperah viewed it as a realm of its dominion ómyô land. Bengalees inhabiting Hill Tipperah were defined as subjects of British-India; and Tipperas can refuse subjection to Manikya dynasty by choosing to move out of the state. Hill Tipperah as a óhomelandô space of particular group was yet to be produced, sanctioned and circulated. The edges of the map would soon become sites for selective disassembling of communities and violence.

[36] The division of various groups as separate nationality by the state began from 1901-2. See the section headed ñPublic Instructionô in Mahadeve Chakravartyôs *Administration Report of Tipperah State since 1901.*

Chapter IV

A New Geography of Tripura: Making it a Homeland

> Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings.[1]

In the preceding chapters, I have articulated two positions: precolonial Tipperah as three inter-connected space and discontinuous geography ôHill Tipperahô as a colonial cartographic construct. This shift from indigenous space/precolonial space to modern western conception of space can be seen as a moment of dislocation in the discursive space: a moment where old indigenous conception of space collided with western modern conception of space. In this chapter, I locate the emergence of a new discourse of Tripura, a homeland: produced, sanctioned and circulated by the new state.[2] Tripura acquired new geographical and historical attribute, óour landô, in place of earlier injunction ómy landô. Such a space has its own geographical peculiarities and temporal inconsistencies hidden to it.

In 1928 a complete map of Tripura for the first time accompanied the Annual Report of Administration of Tripura.[3] By the beginning of twentieth century, census taking and map making had become stateôs twin obsessions to inscribe its power over a marked geography. While earlier and colonial maps located ôTipperahô within the geography of the region, the map which accompanied the report in 1928, for the first time, provided a picture of itself, a potential sign or ólogoô (Fig. 4.1).

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[1] Edward W Said.1994. *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage: London, p.3.
[2] Tipperah was re-named as ôTripuraô in 1920 for which the Rajah obtained permission from British-India.
[3] Mahadev Chakravarti, *Administrative Report of Tripura State since 1902,* Vol. IV, p.1237.

Fig.4.1. Published in the 1928 Tripura Annual Administrative Report

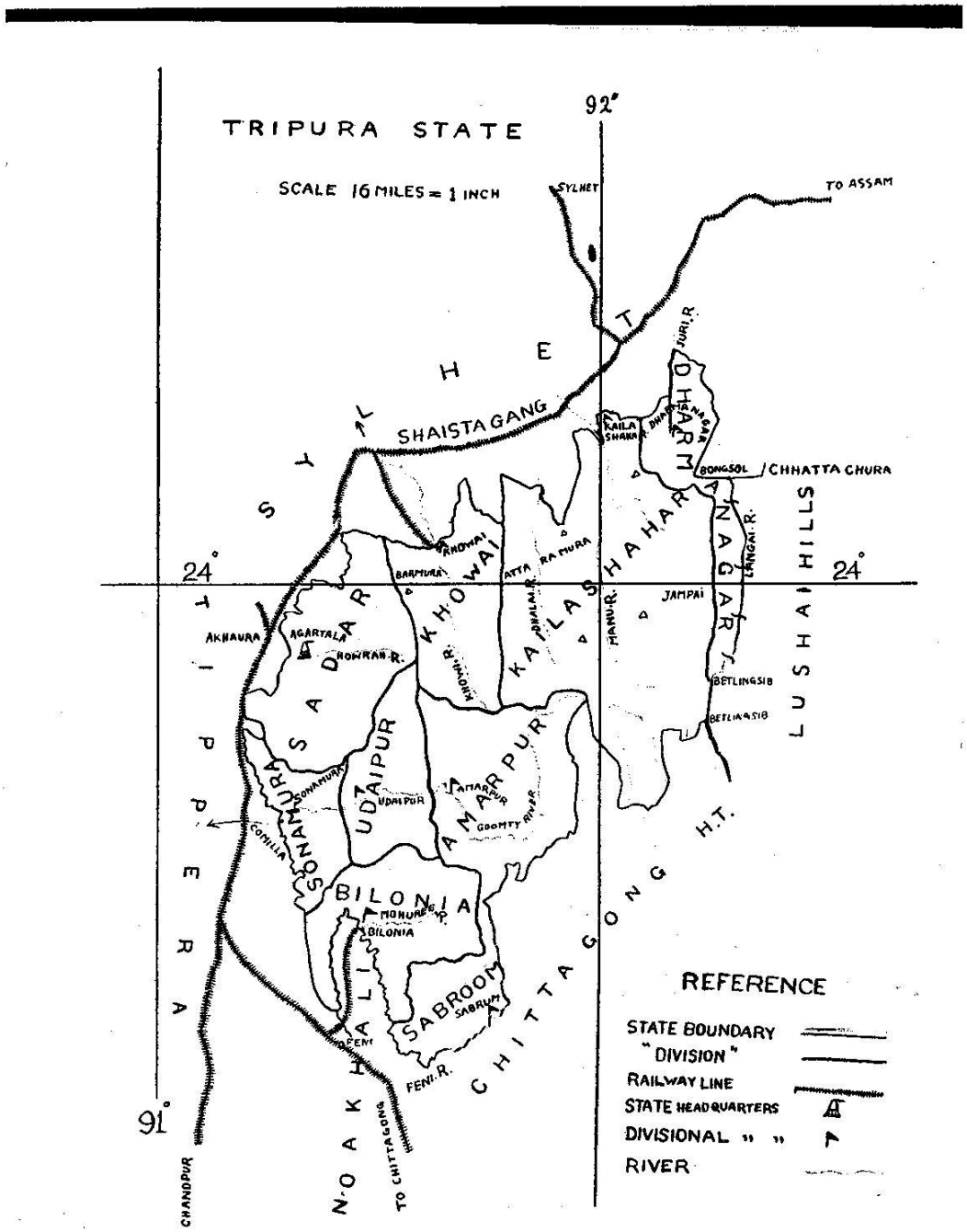
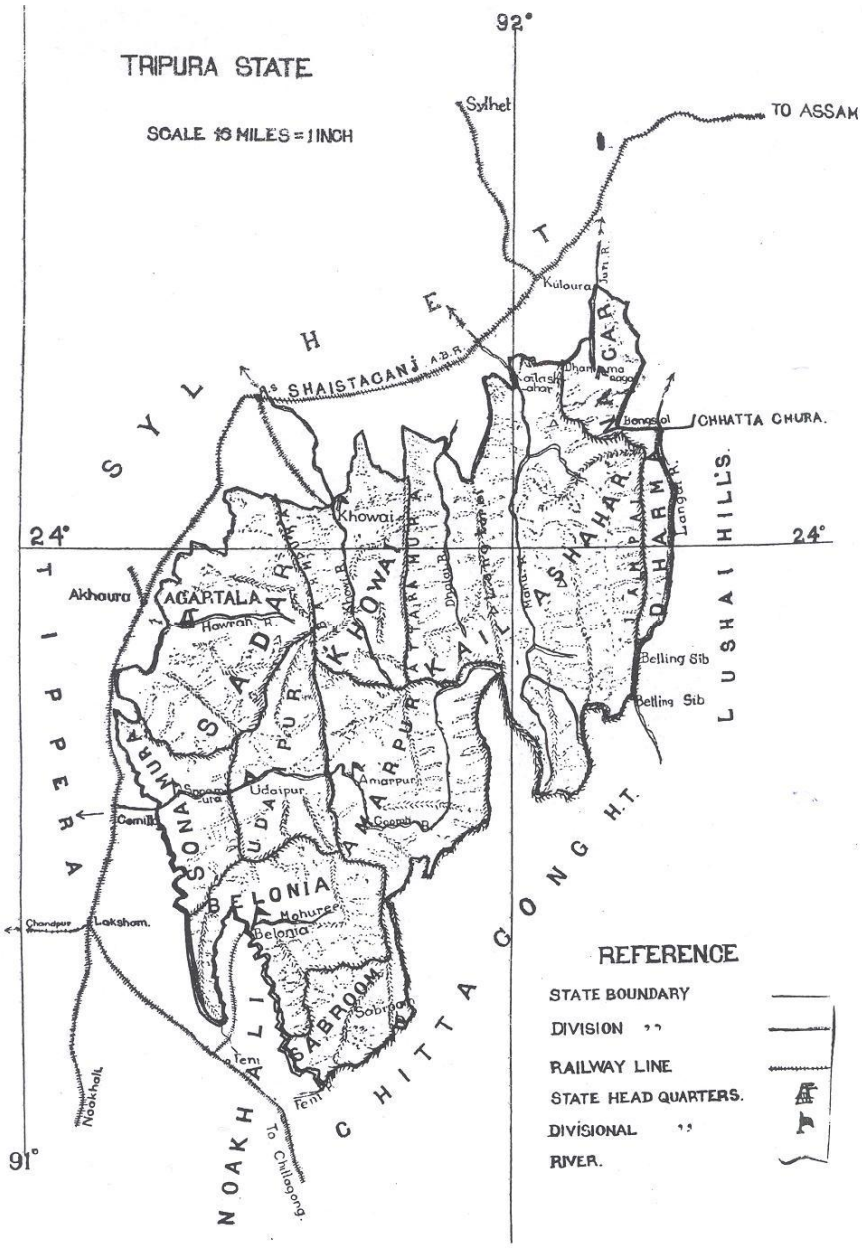


Fig. 4.2. Published in 1931 Tripura Annual Administrative Report



The earlier maps concentrated upon the geo-politics of locating Tipperah along side other colonial marked places. The map of (and after) 1928 was predicated upon politics of producing modern state-space of Tripura. These maps no longer located Tripura ówhere-it-isô, but portrayed ówhat-it-isô (Fig. 4.2).

However, though map making was attuned to production of bordered place, bordered historical subjects still eluded the state. The possibility of wrenching mobile hill people from old indigenous space and converting them into surplus producing state subjects was still an illusion. The state relied on importation of British subjects, read Bengalee, induced by low rent for agricultural and industrial production.[4] The situation obtaining in Tripura during this period can be described as queer: incommensurability between imposition of bordered place and the notion of citizenship and exclusion. While the óhill menô, designated subjects of Tripura Raja, were moving out of the newly produced bordered place, huge number of óplains menô, designated British subjects, were imported for surplus production. It is interesting to note that British political agents in Tripura were unable to make the Raja understand the term óextraditionô.[5] The mapped place was yet to be inscribed with texts of linkage to a particular identity. A particularised discourse of place has not yet emerged.

A look at the politics of enumeration of population (census), carried out by the state, would be particularly helpful in pointing out the absence or failure to construct that ólinkô. Instead of taking census data as biased interpretation for proofs to be evinced in

[4] The system of instalment of Bengalee peasants for agriculture was called ójangal-abadiô system in which Bengalee tenants accepted a lease in Tripura for reclamation and got remission of rent for at least three years, Chrakravarti, *Administration Report of Tripura State since 1902,* Vol. 1, p.21. Dipak Kumar Choudhury (2006) also writes that, óto extend cultivation and increase the revenue Bengalees from British District are encouraged to migrateé the newcomer do not at once entirely leave their resident in British territoryô, for full discussion see ñTripura in 1886: A Socio-Economic Profileô *Proceedings of NEIHA*, BHASA, Agartala, pp.59-68.

[5] A W B Power who was the first Political Agent writes, óthe provisions of Act XI of 1872 (Extradition Act: Mine) were made applicable to Hill Tipperah, and the Lieutenant Governor directed that under section 8 of the act, cases where British-Subjects charged with any offence were arrested in Hill Tipperah should be tried by the Political Agent, provided the Rajah did not object. An interview with the Rajah held for that purpose of explaining him the provisions of Act XI of 1872, and ascertaining what action he proposed to take, I was led to believe that he consented to this course, though unwillingly. It appears however, that he either did not quite understand the act or changed his mind since. The matter forms the subject of a separate communicationò in *Administration Report of the Political Agency, Hill Tipperah (1872-2878),* Vol. 1, Tripura Cultural Research Institute and Museum, Government of Tripura, p.27. (compiled and edited by Dipak Kumar Choudhuri in 1996).

support of rival histories, my intention rest on debunking such historicised claims.[6] The census (1901) listed as many as 38070 hill people as ónot classifiedô or non-classifiable ï a telling example of stateôs inability to classify and make sense of numerous mobile population in the higher mountainous region.[7] More than this, it demonstrates Tripura stateôs inability to govern the higher hills: numerous hill communities still refused to be subjects.

The census also records total population of Tripura as 1, 73,325 of which only 74,242 is classified as ópeopleô of Tripura. The Bengalee peasants, installed as agricultural workers, were still designated as óBritish subjectsô by British-India and Tripura. Obviously this is a particular example. Perhaps there are other examples which record the Bengalee population in Tripura as subjects of Tripura then. My purpose here is to illustrate this point: that is this, despite the emergence of a mapped place; neither the Bengalee-Hindu nor the majority hill people articulated Tripura as a homeland. This politics would be set into motion, within a decade, marking the evolution of a modern state, desirous of imprinting its power (including its conception of place and people) onto the modern geography.

[6] Almost all writings by Tripuri ethno-nationalists and Bengalee writers selectively use census data to support rival claims. The former use it to categorise Bengalee-Hindu as óoutsiderô; the latter used it as proofs of their presence in Tripura even before partition of British-India. In their attempts to make use of the census data in support of their claims, accuracy of these censuses is conveniently silenced. More importantly, neither the Bengalees nor Tripuris began imagining a mutually exclusive home-space in a very modern sense despite the emergence of a relatively modern place. For examples see Subir Bhaumik, ñDisaster in Tripuraò, *Seminar-India, op cit.* Manas Paul.2009. The Eye Witness: Tales From Tripuraôs Ethnic Conflict, Lancer: New Delhi and Frankfort, pp.24-31.and Bijoy Kumar Hrankhalôs speech at 20th meeting of Working Group of Indigenous Population, Geneva, 2002 (appendix I).

[7] The earlier census (1872 and 1881) were rejected as óincompleteô and óinaccurateô, and in the 1901 census the entire Tippera population were characterised as óanimistsô but were classified as óHindusô in the next census. Somendrachandra Debbarma.1997. *Census Bibrani,* Tripura Tribal Research Institute, Agartala, pp.10-12 and 26 (Reprint).

Anarchic Cacophony: A Discordant Place

The years that preceded the accession (to India) were particularly harsh on the Bengalee-Muslims who constituted second largest group in Tripura prior to partition of British-India. The state police literally hounded out Bengalee-Muslims, who were hiding in far-flung Tripuri villages, and forced them out of Tripura.[8] The state also employed its sanctioned violence to keep out ótribalsô ï the prevention of entry into Tripura of about 2500 Tripuris (extruded from East Pakistan) in 1956 is a case in point.[9] The struggle to define óoutsiderô, to exert power over ópeopleô inside a territory, and to kill designated ótrespasserô is inherently spatial. The biased state violence, directed against particular communities, was symptomatic of the exclusivist re-imagination of place being sanctioned and produced by the new state.

How has this rationalised, state sanctioned, violence towards selected communities become possible within a span of half a century? The fluid and porous borders transformed into sanctified sites of selective disassembling of population can be seen as culmination of the final disjunction or rupture in the old indigenous interconnected spaces. This rupture posits the emergence of modern political identity or that collective identity becomes political. In this section, I wish to analyse the emergence of competing interpretations of Tripura as homeland. I plan to do this by reconstructing a critical period in Tripuraôs political history ï the period that preceded

[8] This research scholarôs father was a witness of police brutality on Muslims. He use to recall how Muslims in his village were hounded out by the police, tied to bamboo poles and lashed. See also Aghore Debbarmaôs (2003) writing about ówholesaleô expulsion of Muslims from Tripura in his memoir, *Upajatider Proti CPI(M) Pratir Biswasghataka Aitihasik Dalil*, Self Published: Agartala, pp.12-14.

[9] When they defied police order and entered Tripura they were shot at by the police, about 35 were killed. For a detail account of incident see Aghore Debbarma, *Upajatider Proti CPI(M) Partir Biswasghataka Aitihasik Dalil*, pp.18-20.

the collapse of Manikya dynasty. This period had often been studied as a ótransitionô ï end of monarchy and appearance of ópopularô government. My focus will be on the disjunction of certain kind of space and the appearance of new ways of conceptualising space.

The moment in history, when rival notions of place emerge and contest for power over the new geographical formation it can be described as anarchic cacophony. It borders on anarchy because multiple groups struggle to impose their own notion of place, people, past and future. That moment is anarchic ï collapse of political centre; variegated discordant political overtones on crescendo; and the masses mobilised for the impending political dispensation. The moment can also be described as moment of political liminality, characterised by violence, legal vacuum (especially spaces outside urban centers), and uncertain political future.

The period between the death of the last Manikya ruler (1947) and the formation of Tripura Territorial Council (1963) resembled the cacophonic anarchy I have described above. This period requires analytical dissection without which understanding modern politics of identity and place in Tripura may be impossible. It is a period when multiple conceptions Tripura (its history and geography) emerged, masses mobilised around it, and contesting political elites sought to inscribe new ideas of Tripura. The old geography of power and rule had disintegrated and in the new geographical or spatial formation modern conception of place and people required production and circulation. Place Tripura was no longer merely an ongoing project of extractive space for the Manikyas, rather site for inventing modern home-space.

This anarchic cacophony stemmed from three competing interpretations of Tripura. One, Tripura is a home of Bengalee-Muslims, a territoriality integral to severed Muslim space. Two, Tripura is home of a ótribalsô, an original land of Tripuris and the Bengalees (both Hindus and Muslims) were óimmigrantsô. Three, Tripura is a ónaturalô home of Bengalee-Hindus, a place within óBengalô and therefore órightfullyô part of India. These three competing ideas of homeland did not necessarily divide the political elites on ethnic lines. In the din of the cacophony the Queen Regent fled to Shillong, then capital of Assam, leaving Tripura to uncertain, scary future. The divided former Tripuri elites, the fading aristocrats threw their lot behind these three homeland ideologies.

These three distinct ideas of homeland, championed by new political elites had to work within a situation of political liminality. In order to legitimate itself, within a historically and geographically contingent place, particular political elite desired to inscribe its conception of that historically contingent place by taking over the political void. To do this, especially in the emerging political mores, mobilising the masses around new ideology of place was utmost important. In this project, the new Tripuri elites were placed at advantaged position. More than this, acceptability within the larger spatial formation of new nations-state was critical. The Bengalee-Hindu political elites, under the banner of Indian National Congress, were placed at advantageous position in this. I will examine these groups briefly below.

It is pertinent to point out that prior to partition of British-India Bengalee-Muslims constituted second largest population in Tripura. In fact, in the mid Eighteen century Muslims, under the leadership of Samzeer Gazi have overthrown Manikya dynasty

and ruled Tripura for a brief period.[10] Given this history, Bengalee-Muslims led by Anjuman-e-Islamee, on the eve of partition and the period leading to merger with Indian Union in 1949 made attempt to merge Tripura with its severed Muslims-space, East Pakistan.[11] It appears that the Anjuman-e-Islamee had the support of brother of the deceased Raja, Maharajkumar Durjoy Kishore Debbarman. This relationship between the Muslims and one of the prominent of member of the royal family had been termed by Tripuraôs most prominent political historian as óunholy allianceô.[12] After Tripuraôs merger with Indian Union, the Muslim became the ónemyô to be hounded out of Tripura.

The new Tripuri ethno-nationalists mostly comprised of leaders of Jana Siksha Samiti (JSS) formed in 1944 with the stated goal of óemancipationô of Tripuris. Besides their emancipatory goal, they had organised and mobilised Tripuris against monarchy and Bengalee dominance in the administration.[13] A handful of communists (Bengalee communist leaders dispatch by the Communist party of India) rallied behind the new Tripuri elites.[14] The members of JSS formed the Tripur Jatiyo Ganamukti Parishad (GMP) in 1948 with the intention of overthrowing the last vestiges tottering

[10] The Muslim rebellion overthrew the Manikya dynasty and ransacked the capital at Udaipur during the reign of Krishna Manikya (1748-1783). He established his capital at present day Agartal in 1760, See Gan Choudhuri, *A Constiutional History of Tripura*, op cit. pp.171-178; Also see Bibhas Kanti Kilikdar.1995. *Tripura of Eighteen Century with Samsher Gazi Against Feudalism*, Tripura State Tribal Cultural Research Institute and Museum: Agartala.

[11] Jagadish Gan-Choudhuri writes óhuge procession of hundreds of Muslims, carrying league flags and raising deafening cries of Allah Ho Akbar, Naraye Takdir, pakistan Zindabad, Ladke lenge Hindustan used to come out almost every evening in the streets of Agartala, Udaipur, Sonamura and other towns. Their passage through the streets used to create terrorô *Constitutional History of Tripura*, p.311.

[12] Ibid, p.307.

[13] Some of the prominent members of JSS were Dasrath Debbarma, Sudhanwa Debbarma, Hemanta Debbarma, Nilmoni Debbarma, Khagendra Debbarma, Rabindra Debbarma. Dasrath Debbarma became chief minister of Tripura in 1993.

[14] The leaders of JSS and later GMP are often discussed as communists. However, it may be useful to clarify that, as noted by then prominent communist leader, the communist movement in Tripura was purely Bengalee affair. Apart from Aghore Debbarma, no other ótribalô leader claimed to be communist. The tribal leaders merely proclaimed themselves as ófriends of communistsô. See Deboprasad Sengupta, *History of Communist and Democratic Movement in Tripura*, Tripura Darpan: Agartala, pp.22 and 60 (undated).

administrative elites of monarchy and expulsion of Bengalees.[15] Other groups with similar incendiary political objectives were Bir Bikram Tripura Sangha and Senkrak. Together these organisations propagated expulsion of Bengalees from Tripura, recollected as ôBongal Khedaô movement.[16] The Bengalee-Hindus were narrated as the other ôoutsiderô ôrefugeeô and ôillegal immigrantsô. This subject will receive further elaboration in the next chapter.

The third homeland ideology found expression among Bengalee-Hindu political elites who are defined by Jagadish Gan Choudhuri as ôfreedom fightersô.[17] According to him, Sukumar Bhowmuk, who ôon a momentous visionô found the ôtribal youthôs idea of homelandô more dangerous than the ôcommunal frenzyô of Muslims, ôestablished among Bengalee-Hindus a patriotic organisationô and infused in them patriotism and ôgospel of fearless strength and forceô.[18] To put it simply, Bengalee-Hindus who espoused this homeland ideology designated themselves as ôpatriotsô and they were either sympathetic to or already members of Congress.[19] Besides being ôpatrioticô, they claimed to be saviours of Tripura ï to save Tripura from ôtribalsô and ôBengalee-Muslimsô distorted notions of Tripura.

The idea that Tripura has always been a place within Bengalô and therefore part of India attends to a particular way of spatialising homeland ideology. Obviously, this is only one way of imagining ôBengalô ï it leaves out the ôBengalô which came to be

[15] Jagadish Gan Choudhuri writes, the GMP forgot the fact that ôAfghans and Mughals had attacked Tripura several times and the Bengalee army had poured out its blood like water for defense of Tripuraô, *Constitutional History of Tripura*, p.416.
[16] Benimadhab Majumdar.1997. *The Legislative Opposition in Tripura*, Tribal Research Institute: Agartala, p.16.
[17] See Jagadish Gan Choudhury, A *Constitutional History of Tripura*, p.312.
[18] The organisation was called Tripura Bengali-Hindu Sammilani, Ibid.
[19] To name a few, they were Sukhmoy Sengupta, Sachindra Lal Singh, Umesh Singh and Anil Chakrabarty. Sachindra Lal Singh became Tripuraôs first Chief Minsiter.

redefined as ôEast Pakistanô. This therefore, in many ways, involves re-imagination of space that can be called ôBengalô, as homeland of Bengalee-Hindus. The other ôBengalô, not only becomes a stigmatised space but what it constitutes becomes the enemy. The ways groups define its ôenemyô provides important insights to its ideology. A letter sent by Bengal Pradesh Congress, on behalf of Tripura Congress, to Sardar Patel articulates the ôenemy functionô in this manner.

> The situation there is serious and may, at any time become critical. An *ex-military men's association* has been formed just on the border of the state, and there has already began slow, but steady *infiltration of Muslims* from East Bengal. The Dewan is suspected of encouraging the demands of the Muslims, who form majority in the plains, though they are a minority in the whole state. If possible the present *Dewan should be removed and an experienced ex-military officer should be appointed as Dewan, as in near future the question of defence is likely to be the most important thing* (all emphasis mine).[20]

The letter specifically spelt out and defined enemy: the World War II disbanded Tripuri soldiers (active members of Seng Krak and Tripura Sangha, and were later inducted into the Tripur Jatiyo Mukti Parishad) and the infiltrating Muslims. The agenda of the letter was installation of a government, sympathetic to the agenda of the Bengalee-Hindus, headed by ôex-militaryô capable of crushing rival groups. Suddenly, in the eye of a particular political elites, the Muslim has become the ôotherô, the ôinfiltratorô, whereas exodus of the Bengalee-Hindu is conceptualised as natural, a sort of ôcoming homeô.

Another feature of the anarchy was a semblance of paranoia afflicting the administration. Immediately after death of the Raja and the formation of anti Bengalee-Hindu fronts among Tripuris, mass sacking of Tripuris from higher ranking

[20] Quoted from Jagdish Gan-Choudhuri, *A Constitutional History of Tripura*, pp.309-10.

offices was set into motion. The large scale expulsions of top Tripuri officials in the state occurred simultaneously with the emergent of a new discourse of Tripura as ôBengalee-Hindu stateô among Bengalee-Hindu elites.[21] This acts by the state allowed a particular political elite to marginalise or push to the margins advocates of rival imaginings of place or discourse, and thereby making it hegemonic.

It is interesting to see how a particular group were busy mobilising the masses in the hills, while another group was busy negotiating with the new Indian state (read Congress) for intervention in their favour. The path adopted by rival groups for legitimate political power differed in two aspects. First, the new Tripuri elites sought to capture power through mobilisation of the hill people, while the Bengalee-Hindu elites relied on sanction and legitimacy from Indian National Congress and required engineering a new political constituency.[22]

Second, rival groups employed strategies for discrediting of the ôotherô (as well as rival conception of place) as the ôenemyô or anti-thesis to new state. As argued above, the various Tripuri organisations conceptualised Tripura as home of the Tripuris and other hill communities; the ôBengaleeô is imagined as the ôotherô to be expelled. The Bengalee (Hindu) elites conceptualised Tripura as ônaturalô part of Bengal and India. Between the two rival discourses of place, the later had at its disposal sanctioned instrument of violence. In 1949, the state had banned all organisation by rival groups

[21] For a complete list of expulsion, and the emergent of this new discourse of Tripura among Bengalee elites see Agore Debbarma, *Upajatider Prati CPIM partir Biswasgatokar Eitahisik Dalil*, pp.12-14.
[22] A new constituency was required because it lacked support among the Tripuris and other hill communities. Therefore, the need to convert the state as ñBengalee-Hindu predominant stateô through settlement of large number of Bengalee refugees looking for a new home after partition, Agore Debbarma, *Upajatider Prati CPIM partir Biswasgatokar Eitahisik Dalil*, pp.11-14 and 63, 66.

and jailed a handful of Bengalee communists having close link with the JSS.[23] The year also saw, purportedly first ever, JSS mass rally at the capital, Agartala, under the leadership of Aghore Debbarma. Deboprosad Sengupta described the rally in this manner,

> We witnessed another turning point in 1949. In the month of august of that year, a big rally was organised by comrade Aghore Debbarma and Hemanta Debbarma. The people from the tribal areas entered the town in big procession raising war cries of protest and assembled in the Umakanta field. There a charter of demand was adoptedé é The consolidation and discipline and strength of the rally silenced the police and the administration. [24]

After the rally, the paranoid state, declared martial law and for the first time the state police set out to discipline and order the ótribalô. Proscribed by the state, JSS established an armed wing (Tripur Jatiyo Mukti Parishad) to resist the state. The response of the state was symptomatic of the attitude of non-tolerance towards rival groups manoeuvre for power. The imposition of martial law had to be seen in the context of attempt by particular political elite to delegitimate and marginalise rival conception of place. Virtually, a reign of terror engulfed the country sides marked by large scale police brutalities, witch hunt of ótribalô leaders and resistance.[25]

A New Home-Space Imagined

[23] In fact the link also made convenient for the state to brand the JSS leaders as communist and proscribe them.
[24] Deboprosad Sengupta was a Bengalee communist leader dispatched form Calcutta to spread the movement in Commila region of present day Bangladesh. He later chose to work in Tripura, Sengupta, *History of Communist and Democratic Movement in Tripura*, op cit. pp.57.
[25] Sengupta noted that óthe hills were raging in angerô and male members of village would escape into jungles for fear of police brutalities. The female members of the village were left to resist the state, *History of Communist and Democratic Movement in Tripura*, p.61.

Proscribing groups wedded to rival ideology of place do not constitute sufficient condition for the emergence of a naturalised homeland. It merely defines an ‘enemy’ which can be designated as ‘anti-national’ or ‘secessionist’. It allows the state to map out certain spatial ideologies to be silenced as illegitimate and incorrect. The state or the new legitimate political elites need to produce connection between ‘people’ and a marked place through multiple techniques of spatialisation, or in the words of Deshpande, ‘spatial strategies’.[26] From here on, in this chapter, I propose to analyse the various spatial techniques employed by the state and Bengalee-Hindu writers – techniques of inscribing Bengalee-Hindu past and identity into the landscape.

The period of cacophonous anarchy ended after Indian state took over the administration of the state.[27] One of the immediate political goals of the new state was production and circulation of new discourse of homeland – a ‘discourse about space and about things and people in space’. The post partition rehabilitated Bengalee-Hindus, besides changing the demography, transformed the landscape of Tripura – as a landscape of ‘refugees’, of displaced people from their homeland. A new discourse of homeland – discourse of belonging to Tripura – would re-invent the landscape by unearthing their past within Tripura. To do this, the place had to be stripped of human history, the hill people had to be imagined (once again) as mobile, nomad and place-less. Therefore, the hill people, similar to the Bengalee-Hindus, await state intervention, rehabilitation.[28]

[26] Sathish Deshpande, *Contemporary India: A Sociological Perspective*, p.74-97.
[27] In 1949 the Queen Regent of Tripura signed the Instrument of Accession, 1956 Tripura became a Territorial Council and in 1963 a Union Territory.
[28] The logic for colony establishment for the Bengalee-Hindus has to be arrived at from a deeply problematic understanding of non-inhabited spots as ‘vacant land’ or ‘un-utilised’. See for example, Gayatri Bhattacharyya.1988. *Refugee Rehabillitation and its Impact on Tripura’s Economy,* Omsons Publication: New Delhi and Guwahati, pp.7, 10-11.

The administratorôs speech in the Legislative Assembly captures the gist of this new discourse.[29] The speech initiates new identity of Tripura, of a place peopled by ñscheduled tribes, scheduled castes, backward classes and displaced persons. Tripuraôs recent history is one of continuous saga of struggle for rehabilitation and survival.ò Then the speech hits out at people who reject this new identity of Tripura.

> It is a matter of regret, therefore, that far from helping in the process of reconstruction, some short sighted and mistaken enthusiasts have been trying to tear the problem of the unfortunate and gullible people out of context and fanning the flames of separation and isolation. The tragic consequence of such dangerous calls is now too well known to need mention. Certain disruptive elements wedded to terrorism are threatening others to quit this territory.

Two aspects of the speech are relevant for my argument here. First, the speech suggests re-imagination of Tripura as óland of tribal and non-tribalô, no longer merely a part of India. This new identity of Tripura, apart from erasing the órefugeeô inscribed on the non-tribal, changes the very meaning of the transformed landscape. Second, it reproduces the ótribalô as ósimpleôï not necessarily ósavageô or óinnocentôï incapable of history. This image of ósimple tribalô played important part in unearthing of history of Tripura as history of the ónon-tribalô. It also successfully castigates other ways of imagining Tripura ï simple tribalsô imagination ï as óanti-governmentô, and óanti-nationalô.

> Individuals or groups indulging in fissiparous activities promoting disunity and rift among the various sector of the populace not only harms himself but also blurs the very which has harboured under its wings the simple tribals and distressed refuges, the landless backward classes (sic).[30]

[29] *Tripura Legislative Assembly proceedings*, series XII, Vol. 1-2, series XIII, 1-2, 1968, p.1.
[30] *Tripura Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, op cit. p.8.

Within a span of over two decades, since the disruption of Manikya dynasty, the new state enforced its definition of ôoutsiderô (Bengalee-Muslims), ôanti-nationalô (Tripuri ethno-nationalists) and inscribed new text on the landscape.` Rival conceptions of place (Tripura) have been pushed to the margin, denounced and designated as ôanti-nationalô. Once the new state (controlled by new political elites) succeeded sanctioning its new conception of Tripura, it continuously invests in it ï ideological, financial, and institutional ï as well as blocked other ways of imagining it. However, rival geographies cannot be erased. Space can never be totally annihilated. In the apt words of Henri Lefebvre,

> These seething forces are still capable of rattling the cauldron of the state and its space, for difference can never totally be quieted. Though defeated, they live on and from time to time they begin fighting ferociously to reassert themselves and transform themselves through struggle.[31]

The rival geographies will be the subject of next chapter. Below I discuss three spatial techniques, employed by the state in general (and the Bengalee-Hindu writers in particular), that articulates this new identity of place. Many of these literatures were produced after the ethnic conflict (between Bengalee-Hindus and Tripuris) in 1980. I intend to analyse in these literatures how the Bengalee-Hindu imagines Tripura ï their ôimaginative geographiesô[32] of Tripura. The three spatial techniques are: inventing sacred geographies, imagining common past/enemy, and ambivalent border.

Unearthing sacred geographies

[31] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.23.

[32] The term ôimaginative geographyô was first used by Edward said to describe the representation of the orient by the West. As mentioned earlier Said used the term to analyse how groups distinguish and dramatise the distance and difference between ôourô space and ôtheirsô. Imaginative geographies based on binary opposition, play important part in historical construction of contrasting images, see Edward Said, *Orientalism*, pp.54-55.

Initially, I had stated that, in order to justify rehabilitation a place must be stripped of human history ï the site for re-assemblage of population as absence of human history. Tripura is construed as home of ósimpleô and ócordinaryô hill nomads and thereby making possible rehabilitation of displaced people, victims of partition.[33] Once rehabilitation has been successfully carried out, invention of new geographies of belonging for the rehabilitated becomes critical. This can be done, first by discrediting or devaluing existing history as non-history, and advocating a past that incorporates the Bengalee-Hinduôs presence into the landscapes.[34] Ruined sacred geographies, that incorporate their presence into the landscapes, are unearthed and the state marks out such sites and sanctifies them. These sacred geographies are then used as proofs of link between Bengalee population and the land.[35] The attempt to construct new sacred geographies for the Bengalees appeared in first Gazetteers of the state.

> A school of opinion holds that the name of Gumti and Manu are incontrovertible evidence of early colonisation of Tripura by small group of Aryans. The ancient of capital of Ayodhya stood on the banks of Saraju of which a branch was the Gumti. Manu whose commandments regulated our social life for centuries was an Aryan and it is significant that one of the principle rivers of Tripura bears the same name. It is also interesting that this river flows near kailasahar (corrupted from kailasa-har and Unokuti, the famous pilgrims spot, is only six mile from Kailasahar. Another significant point is that the principle hill ranges, which stretched across Tripura, and which in fact, have given the districts its hilly name have ancient name. In the puranic literature these hills are known as Raghunandan Parvat. From the names of the hills

[33] Rehabilitation of Bengalee refugee in Tripura, apart from crushing the ócanti-nationalô forces, was an important task for governance during 1948-1970. See the assembly debates of this period, *Assembly Proceedings* (1964-1972); see also Gayatri Bhattacharya, *Refugee rehabilitation in Tripura* op.cit.

[34] As early as 1963, Sunil Dutt, a member of state legislature had already announced the need for new history of Tripura. He opined that óRajmala is not a history. It only tells about legendsé .in Sonamura, Sabroom, Belonia subdivisions and areas within the subdivisions we find images of various deities scattered. History of Tripura can be constructed from these imagesô *Assembly Proceedings*, Series 1. Vol.1-9, October, 1963, p.9.

[35] It may be mentioned here that as recent as 1947, neither a Tripura ruler nor their chronicle tell of any Hindu holy sites within present state of Tripura. As mentioned earlier holy sites, worthy of pilgrimage have always been the Brindabans, Mathura, Gaya etcé Tripura has always been a Manikyan stigmatised space.

> and the rivers it is suggested that Kirata (pre-historic Tripura) was not entirely a land of the non-Arayans. It is supposed that in those early times Aryan settlement must have been established in these parts of the country. There are also other names which suggest a link with Sanskrit language such as Hrsymukh, Unokuti, Tirthamukh, Trilochan etc (sic).[36]

Imagining new sacred geographies, by the new state, do not only makes possible rooting or locating of Bengalee-Hindus inside the spatial frame, but also produces the existence of eternal, ancient and immutable link between ancient Tripura and the Aryan civilisation. This ólinkô is, then, used as a premise to connect modern Tripura to the modern Indian-nation state.[37] Connection of Tripura to the modern Indian nation-state needs to be continually emphasised in order to deligitimate and counter rival groups, especially Tripuri ethno-nationalistsô notion of óBengalee-as-outsiderô, which is often accompanied with demand for secession from Indian nation-state.

Historiography in the postcolonial Tripura, a field overwhelmingly controlled by Bengalee intelligentsia, rest upon location of a place-Tripura within Indic Aryan spatio-temporal frame, more importantly within the historical-geographical territoriality of former óBengalô. The fundamental principle, on which this historiography rest upon is, Tripura has always been part of óBengalô.[38] The past

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[36] K D Menon, *Tripura District Gazetteer*, p.7. Similarly, S N Guha Thakurta (1986) writes rivers Gomoti and Manu suggest early colonization of Tripura by Aryans because they bear Hindu names. ñThus from the names of the hills and rivers, it seems the land was not entirely the land of the non-Aryan, and perhaps some distant past there was as Aryan settlementô in *Tripura*, National Book Trust of India, p.25.

[37] Gan-Chaudhuri writes, ñFrom geological, geographical, ethnographic and political points of view, Tripuraôs ties with the rest of India are inseparable. Tripura is intimately related to the other parts of India from the hoary pastò *A Constitutional History of Tripura*, p.26. Also see Nalini Ranjan Roy Choudhuri.1980. ñThe Historical Pastò in Jagadish Gan-Choudhrui (ed), *Tripura: The Land and its People,* Leeladevi Publication: New Delhi, P.13-42.

[38] Towards this Bengalee historians cite few instances from history, e.g, former king of Tripura bathing in sacred rivers in present day Indian state of West Bengal, see Subhir Bhaumik.2002. ñThe Dam and the Tribalò, *himalmag,* <http://www.himalmag.com/component/content/article/1734-The-Dam-and-the-Tribal.html> (accessed 13 December 2006).

ógreatnessô (a term overused by both Bengalee academics and Tripuri ethno-nationalists) of Tripura kingdom (and its kings) is attributed to Tripuraôs intimate, irrefutable, irreversible link to the precolonial Bengal.

Locating Tripura within the history and geography of former Bengal also make possible reconciliation of the dichotomy ï narrating of Tripuris as simple, mobile people and as state-making people ï inherent in their historiography. The possibility of state-making, and the attributed ógreatnessô of the Tripuri rulers can take place only in relation to the Bengal connection. Outside this relationship, it is impossible to imagine mobile, simple hill people as state-making people, a state which withstood tides of Mughal attacks.

The invention of sacred geographies ï holy sites, rivers, monuments ï is a spatial strategy that aims to achieve two things: emplacement or rooting of particular people to a particular place; and connect this particular place to certain history and geography. I will return to these holy sites, names of rivers and monuments in the next chapter to show how these sites are contested.

Common past: inventing the ócenemyô

The invention, or rather unearthing, of sacred geographies is simultaneously appropriation of past and production of memory; a process embedded with silences, selectivity and marginalisation. What constituted history in the earlier political formation, a political formation whose politico-religious rationality depended on

divine cosmography, cannot be said to constitute the modern state. A new narrative of past, distinct from earlier mode of narration, was needed by the new political elites.

The earliest attempt to shape a new narrative of past can be gleaned from a book ôTripura: The Land and its Peopleô.[39] Traces of these narratives were already perceptible during the period of ónarchyô when discordant notes of place clashed and conflicted. The tenet of the book is to construct a common history between Tripuris (and other ótribalô communities) and Bengalee-Hindus.[40] A common history, in the form of a shared past, was acutely and urgently felt by the new political elites in order to normalise the recent history of mass rehabilitation of Bengalee population. This normalisation was required to counter rival discourse which called for deportation of óoutsidersô. By inventing a common history, the twin subjects of the book ï ólandô and ópeopleô are cross-mapped onto each other. This cross-mapping of ólandô and ópeopleô is achieved by denying the existence of multiple conceptions of place and people.

In his recent writings, Jagadish Gan-Chaudhuri attempts to reformulate history geography and discourse of the ótherô.[41] He conceptualised premodern Tipperah as constitutive of five distinct spatialities in the form of óchieftainshipsô (he also differentiate them as ókingdomsô).[42] These were, Bengalee Chieftainship, Tippera Chieftainship, Mog Chieftainshhip (a tribe inhabiting predominantly in south Tripura, they practice Buddhism), Kuki-Lushai Chieftainship and Riang Chieftainship. He writes, ón the struggle for supremacy, the lead was successfully taken by the Tippera

[39] The book is written in the style of Government of India sponsored National Book Trust of India style, whose sole purpose is to present the history of Tripura as shared, peaceful co-existence between tribals and non-tribals and Tripuraôs historical connection to Bengal/India. Jagadish Gan Choudhuri, *Tripura: The Land and its People*, op.cit. pp.1-12 and 13-43.
[40] For similar narrative see Gan-Choudhuri, *A Constitutional History of Tripura*, op cit. P.6-7.
[41] Gan Choudhuri, *A Constitutional History of Tripura*, Ibid.
[42] Ibid, pp.53-56.

dynasty and continued for several centuriesé ..the Tippera dynasty bludgeoned into submission all other chieftainships and united all hills and valleys, ranges and rivers, under its swayô.

It is impossible to controvert the existence of these kingdoms. It is equally impossible to support their existence. As I have stated in chapter two, precolonial history of the region depends on myth-making court chronicles of mimetic Hindu states. Moreover, precolonial history of the region largely falls within the rubric of colonial anthropological construction.[43] However, it is not difficult to detect a fundamental problem in his conceptualisation of identity. Group identity is conceptualised as rigid, unchanging and something universally given, a phenomenon inhabiting permanent spatio-temporality. The identity ótripuriô is still fluid, and its socio-cultural boundary fuzzy. In fact numerous other ethnic identities in the present day northeast India are fluid, ambivalent and continuously changing.[44]

His articulation of history and geography of Tripura appears meaningful, only when placed, within the context of re-imagining Tripura as a home-space of Bengalee-Hindus. It can be read as an attempt to reconstruct a shared history of peaceful co-existence between various groups in present day Tripura.[45] In his reformulated narration of past, the Bengalee-Muslim is imagined as the ótherô or óoutsiderô. The Muslim, of whom the Mughal is the epitome, is narrated as óimperialistô,

[43] Colonial anthropology and historiography of the region centers on narration of ótribesô as migrating from some-place-in-China. This historiography continues to dominate prevailing narratives of the region. For a critique of this historiography see Yasmin Saikia.2005. ñThe Tai-Ahom Connectionò, *Seminar*, <http://www.India-seminar.com/2005/550/550%20yasmin%saikia.htm> (accessed 13 December 2006).

[44] See M S Prabhakara.2010. ñInvention and Reinvention of Ethnicityò, *The Hindu*, Hyderabad, January 4,

[45] This reconstruction of shared existence gains more importance after the wide spread ethnic violence between Bengalees and Tripuris in 1980 and the sporadic violence during 1999-2001.

occupationistô and ôbarbaric invadersô.[46] In a nutshell the Bengalee-Muslim is narrated as common enemy. An example of this narration,

> Tripura was under the occupation of the Mughals for about three years (1618-1620). The invaders *captured elephants* and royal treasures. The Mughal army marauded and looted the wealth of the subjects. The Mughal *soldiers cheerfully and openly enjoyed the pleasure of rape and ravage and they used to foray for sumptuous dishes*. They killed many people. They drained of large tanks in search of treasures. They prohibited the worship of Chaudda Devata and the Tripureshwari Kali. They encouraged the mullas, Pirs and Fakirs to convert many Hindus to Islam by forcing them to eat beef (emphasis mine).[47]

He concludes his book with a tinge of resentment against Tripuris,

> Behind this influx of the Bengali-Hindus smouldered an impulse of fear and hatred in the tribal mind. The tribals forgave the crimes of the imperialist and aggressors and forgot the sacrifice and sufferings of the Bengali-Hindus n resisting the claws of imperialism. Here the tribals committed an error of judgment. No attempt was jointly undertaken to restore Chakla Roshanabad. The tribals directed their entire energy against the Bengali Hindu immigrants who had already been harassed, denationalised and marginalised by the aggressors (the aggressors here being the Bengali-Muslims in the newly created East Pakistan: my insertion). The immigrant Bengali-Hindus again became subjected to similar atrocities by the tribals.[48]

He not only attempts to imagine shared geographies of connection, but also invent shared enemy. This mode of narrative has not been exclusive to Gan-Choudhuri. Another example of this type of narrative is employed by Subir Bhaumik. In one of his articles titled ñHow the Tripuris Got Wiped out by Bangladesh Refugeesò, though initially he categorized the immigrants as ôBangladeshi refugeesô, he justifies their settlement by arguing that at one historical point Tripura ôcontrolledô the territory they migrated from. He resorts to mythic past to show how Tripuri kings had ôcontrolled

[46]Gan-Choudhuri, *A Constitutional History of Tripura,* pp.125, 126, 128.
[47] Ibid, p.126.
[48] Ibid, p.368.

parts of Eastern Bengalô, the stories of Tripuri rulers óbathing in several rivers of Bengalô and the kings ólove for Bengalee culture and languageô and he argues that óeven in the normal course of migration the tribes-people would have become minority in Tripuraô.[49]

In similar vein J D Mandal also writes,

> About 550 years ago, this hilly Tripura was ruled by the Hindu Bengali kings of Bengal. After being driven by famine from Burma (Mayanmar), some tribals under the leadership of Mouchang-Fa entered into this SRI BHUMI. A battle was fought against the intruders. Later the Bengalee king allowed the homeless refugee tribal people to reside in the southern part of the land. There gradually developed a friendship between the Bengalees and the tribals. And later, the descendants of Mouchang-Fa established the Manikya Dynasty in Tripuraé é Though the Tripura was called an independent kingdom, really it was not independent. During last part of Mughal Empire, the kings of Tripura (hill Tripura) had to pay elephant tax i.e. supplying a good number of elephants per year to the emperor of Delhi. On the other hand, the plain part of Tripura i.e. Chakle-Roshanabad had gone under the control of Nawab of Bengal during reign of king Dharma Manikya (1713-29). The king became a Zamindar paying Rs. 50,000/- as revenue to the Nawab. During the British rule everything of Tripura (plain & hill) was under the control of the British. Thus the state was a part of India govt (sic).[50]

In their narrative, Tripura can not be imagined as historically disjuncted space. It has to be narrated as inhabiting a continuous space, a territoriality almost always implicated within the historical-geographical context of óBengalô. This implication makes possible for the state and the majority population emplacement inside modern Tripura. This becomes the basis for constructing their original, historical and eternal

[49] J D Mandal, *The Agony of Tripura,* <hhttp://www.oocities.org/the_agony_of_tripura/> (retrieved, June 2011).
[50] J D Mandal, Ibid.

relationship to the objectively identifiable portion of earthôs surface as óhomeô. But the discourse is not confined to the objectively identifiable; it is also about spaces of past memory, about place names and about imagined spaces of the past.

This process involves, not only rendering of rival notions of Tripura as dissent, but also invest in the production of true history through decision on creation of sources and archives. I have also in mind construction of monuments, specifically, statues of heroes sponsored by the state. These decisions are affected by, not only stateôs attempt to freeze certain type of memory, but also invest place with meaning. Tripuri ethno-nationalist find these monuments and statues invested by the state largely problematic (discuss in next chapter).

Ambivalence of border: erasure and enclosure

The final spatial strategy, employed by the state, is the discourse of border: the present boundary of Tripura, more specifically the international boundary between Tripura and Bangladesh. In the discourse of the ótherô in Tripura, this particular border had been invested with multiple meanings of erasure and enclosure. In both the óofficialô and the ôTripuri ethno-nationalistô discourse of Tripura, this border is simultaneously erased and announced as ónaturalô enclosure.

I have, in the earlier part of this chapter, already pointed out the post-partition (of British-India) exodus of Bengalee-Hindus into Tripura. Their rehabilitation became an

urgent need for Tripura government.[51] The act of categorisation or marker órefugeeô informs the imposition of a border in their movement. It denoted movement between already existing modern territorialities. However, the advent of modern identity politics would disrupt its modernity and transform it into a site for ódifferentô contestation. Here I will restrict to óofficialô discourse of it. As I have underline earlier, I use the word óofficialô to mean what is sanctioned and disciplined by the state.

I have articulated in chapter two on first disjunction of precolonial indigenous space: British-India appropriation of the extractive space based upon colonial spatial ideology óhillô space. Subsequently, this particular boundary defined political realm of the British-India and Tipperah; yet it merely delimited each othersô extractive space without enclosing population. Severed from its historical extractive space, it made sense for Tipperahôs political elites to maintain a fluid, non-exclusive, ambivalent boundary. An ambiguous boundary and absence of rigid identity/place was harnessed towards state project of alchemised conversion of óhillsô into extractive space.

For the first time, during the period of political liminality, this particular boundary assumed contentious meaning. It conjured up multiple notions of difference. The Tripuri ethno-nationalist conceptualised it as a ósiteô for construction of different óhomeô for Tripuris and other hill communities; Whereas, the Bengalee-Hindu political elites conceptualised it as ósiteô where Hindu space and Muslim space meets. After the merger, Tripuri ethno-nationalist version was outlawed as óanti-nationalô and large scale violence against Muslims sanctioned. Two contradictory representations of

[51] Gayatri Bhattacharya, *Refugee Rehabilitation and its Impact on Tripura's Economy*, see the óprefaceô.

present day border between Bangladesh and Tripura may be drawn from such conceptualisations.

First, in order to define the Muslim as the ótherô non-belonging, existence of an imagined natural boundary between Bengalee-Hindu and Bengalee-Muslim required production. Though this do not essentially eventuated in recognition of the present boundary as ónaturalô, a natural primordial boundary was belief to have been in existence further inside the territories of East Pakistan, now Bangladesh.[52] From this point, it becomes possible to define the ótherô not only as ónon-belongingô; but also as óinvadersô óoccupationistsô and óimperialistsô. Invested with meanings as a site of rupture between primordial given identities, modernity of a boundary is disrupted.

Second, as I have argued above, in order to cross-map the link between Bengalee-Hindu and the spatial frame Tripura, the place have to be re-imagined as inhabiting a continuous space, óBengalô. Therefore, simultaneously the boundary, instead of its modernity, is itself disrupted. A borderless geographical reality, óBengalô, have to be constructed without which spatial connections between the colonial produced place and the already existing geography becomes impossible. From these connections, it becomes possible to argue the rehabilitations of uprooted Bengalee-Hindu populations from Pakistan, as a ónaturalô.[53]

[52] Gayatri Bhattacharyya argues that despite loss of their óhome landô to the Muslims in Pakistan, Bengalis feel at home in Tripura and are óemotionally attached to their new homelandô, *Refugee Rehabilitation*, see óprefaceô.
[53] Gayatri Bhattacharya, Ibid. Subhir Bhaumik, *How the Tripurais Got Wiped Out By Bangladesh Refugees,* <http://www.assam.org/article.php?sid=222&PHPSESSID=4f52f85b175bbf496ecdc6e69e7b4527> (accessed November, 2007).

These two contradictory representations illustrates the ambivalence of this border ï its reality implicates the Bengalee-Muslims as the eternal enemy, the ócotherô of territory beyond, unfamiliar space. The border makes real new history of incessant Muslim attack on Tripura; it incriminates the Bengalee-Muslims. This is a new history, in that it ethnicised an enemy ï akin to criminalisation of certain tribes in colonial India. In the Manikyan Tipperah, as shown in chapter two, óBengalô represented diverse identity. One, Bengal was a given extractive space, unlike elsewhere in Southeast Asia, Tipperah rulers did not need to raid the hills for slaves to be concentrated as sedentarised agricultural manpower. Instead it raised mercenaries of hill ótribesô and waged war against rulers of Bengal to wrest small part of its fertile plains which became Tipperahôs extractive space.

Two, Bengal also represented as source of its palace cosmology ï its ideology of rule (divine ruler), sacred genealogy (lunar dynasty) etcé were incorporated with the incorporation of Bengalee Brahmins. Third, Bengal also represented a constant threat to its fragile, somewhat uneasy, control over the extractive space. It cannot maintain a standing army to defend its hold. Through out its history, the Manikyas never maintained a standing army: mercenaries are raised during war and disbanded after the war ï s standing army of hill ótribesô could mean ever lurking threat of rebellion. In fact, during World War II the then ruler of Tripura as a mark of its loyalty to the British Empire raised an army (of Tripuris). After the war, when these men returned, they were immediately disbanded.[54]

[54] When the Congress leaders wrote to Sardar Patel about the dangerous situation of ex-military men ready for revolt in Tripura (quoted in this chapter) they were referring to these disbanded World War II veterans.

The Bengalee-Hindu imagination of Tripura as homeland, then, hides uncomfortable geographical peculiarities ï a particular border as simultaneously a site of enclosure and erasure ï that serve as a premise for Tripuri ethno-nationalist critique. However, such peculiarities are not unique to their homeland ideology. Tripuri ethno-nationalists constantly silence their own geographical discrepancies. After all, homeland is not an objectively identifiable, given territorial entity. It is discursively constructed space. It does not inhabit a continuous temporality.

The Ambivalence of Place

A mapped Tripura did not necessarily become a homeland of a particular identity group. It only makes possible for that space to be articulated as a homeland. But that space is still, inevitably, an ambivalent place: it can engender contradictory ideas of homeland between different identity groups inside a historical territory. As is the case with Tripura, the dissolution of British-India and disruption of Manikya dynasty brought into play three dominant territorial ideologies, or ideas of homeland. While a clear distinction can be made between these three competing ideas of homeland, it is hard to insist on clear distinctions between political elites on ethnic lines. Despite this blur or overlap, I insisted that Bengalee-Hinduô idea of Tripura became as the most acceptable and official idea of Tripura. This idea of Tripura inscribed Bengalee-Hindu past into the landscape and produce it as their homeland by producing connection between identity and place.

In this chapter, I attempted to show three spatial techniques of producing link between place and identity. Obviously, there are other ways of imagining of Tripura as homeland by the Bengalee-Hindus. For example, it is almost impossible to miss, the crucial reiteration of historical association between the poet Rabindranath Tagore and Tripura rulers by modern Bengalee-Hindu writers. Such a narration establishes historical relation between Tripura and Bengal, in particular, and India in general. It converts Tripura as familiar space for the Bengalee-Hindus, even before they created it as their homeland.

In the next (final) chapter, I concentrate on other ways of imagining Tripura by Tripuri ethno-nationalists. My particular interest there will be the production of rival geographies as a way to challenge the state sanctioned idea of Tripura. Within such geographies, the Bengalee-Hindu is not only imagined as ‘other’ but also ‘outsider’. They become the ‘other-outsiders’ in the Tripuri ethno-nationalist imaginative geographies of Tripura.

Chapter V

A Rival Geography of Tripura: The Production of ‘Tripuri’

Political Struggles are not fought on the surface of geography,
but through its very fabric/ation.[1]

Post-Manikya Tripura, as a specific place, is a product of series of disjunctions in space. I have traced its genealogy from indigenous space to as a place within British-India imperial geography, and finally as a place within the new Indian nation-state imaginaries making possible for its re-invention as a ‘home’ by the Bengalee-Hindus. This re-invention, as argued in the previous chapter, takes place via competition with other rival geographical imaginings. This chapter is a reading of one of these rival geographies, particularly spaces that constitute ‘Tripuri’. In the Tripuri ethno-nationalist discourse, ‘Tripura’ becomes a site of loss, estrangement and dislocations. The geography of ethno-nationalism is a struggle within the lived experiences of the dominant Bengalee-Hindu narration of homeland.

Rival geographies, though obscured and consigned to the margin, are never silent geographies. They inhabit, to put it bluntly, as intransigent or recalcitrant spaces represented by those who wish to challenge, subvert and confront the state. That struggle is not fought ‘on the surface of geography, but through its fabrication’. Moreover, as Edward Said commented the ‘struggle over geographyé é é .is not only about soldiers and cannons, but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings’. Following these two important comments, I wish to tease out Tripuri ethno-nationalists narrative of place/Tripura. It is, overwhelmingly, a narrative of

[1] Steve Pile.2000. ñThe Troubled Spaces of Frantz Fanonò in Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift (ed), *Thinking Space*, Routledge: London and New York, p.273.

counter ï which not only attempts to demarcate the boundaries between ôTripuriô and ôBengalee-Hinduô, but contests Bengalee-Hindu idea of homeland. Therefore, it is not merely a narrative of the ôotherô; the ôotherô has to be imagined as non-belonging to a particular territoriality.

The margin is not simply a marked out space where the act of writing do not take place.[2] The very act of ômarking it outô as a space upon which inscribing is prohibited can also be conceptualised as silenced (not silent) space. The ômarginô therefore is not a pre-ideological site, or as Yhome argues, ñthe margin is not space of powerlessness.ò[3] As in the chessboard, the squared spaces empower the tiniest piece, the pawns, to confront, subvert, thwart and challenge the mightiest power. Those who speak from the position of the margin draw upon rival, outlawed histories and geographies to challenge and confront the ôofficialisedô/dominant perspective. Production of this knowledge, from the margin, can be understood as peripheral epistemology of place. This chapter is about this peripheral/ised epistemology of place.

A Story of a Submerged Geography

Perhaps, a dam and the geography it submerged would be a (unusually) good place to begin this investigation into the rival imaginative geography of Tripura. The dam in

[2] ñMarginô has been conceptualised as a ôspace of contradiction and contestationô, especially in the literature on frontiers or borderlands of nation-states, see Kekhriesituo Yhome, *Politics of Region: The Making of Naga Identity During the Colonial and Post-Colonial Era*. This study uses the term ômarginô as a discursive practice, and as a site where counter-hegemonic discourses are silenced. In that sense ômarginô is a site of resistance. Therefore, the ômargin is a site/source of rival histories and geographies.

[3] Using chess as an analogy to explain the relationship between space and power he argues ôconceptualization of power may not be possible without simultaneously conceptualizing spaceô Kekhriesituo Yhome, *Politics of Region: The Making of Naga Identity During the Colonial and Post-Colonial Era.*

question is the Dumbur (Gumti) Hydel Project, controversially commissioned in 1976 by Tripura state.[4] It was constructed on the river Gumti formed by confluence of two rivers *Raima* and *Saima* (also spelt Sarma). The former originates at Longtrai hills and the latter at Atharamura hills. The dam not only displaced huge ótribalô population, but also destroyed what many Tripuri ethno-nationalists termed as, the former ógranaryô of Tripura.[5] But my interest in the dam goes beyond the debate of displacement of ótribalsô. I want to tease out a different kind of discursive encounter ï an encounter that manifest and magnifies the peripheral epistemology of place.

Around the same time the dam was being constructed, the stateôs first Gazetteer was also published.[6] While describing the ecological condition of Raima-Saima valley and the upland, it emphasised the existence of *'Indian elephants'* (emphasis mine) in herds.[7] Seemingly, other wild animals ï deer, tiger, boar, and bear ï that roamed the abundant luxurious hill forests did not qualify as óIndianô. It is a possibility that the óIndianô prefix to a pachyderm is an unintended attribution. Even if it is unintended, such an attribution necessarily illustrates the power to incorporate and link distance, remote places to the Indian nation-space, and can be read as a technology of appropriating unfamiliar landscapes. But that question is outside my scope here. I

[4] The dam was/is 30 meter high, 3.5 km in length and was expected to generate 8.6 mw from an installed capacity of 10 mw. The area to be submerged was projected at 46.34 sq km, Malabika Das Gupta.1989. ñDevelopment and Ecology: Case Study of Gumti Rivers in Tripuraò, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 24, No. 40 (October 7) p.2267.
[5] ñDumbur is misnomer, its original kokborok name is Dongor. This place is related to Borok mythology of Dongoi of Tripura. It was one of the most fertile land in Twipra and was called the granary of Twipra. The people in this area were self sufficient and were contended with the way they lived. But in the year 1971 under the Chief Ministry of Late Sachin Singh during the Congress regime in Twipra, a damn was constructed over the rivers Raima and Saima junction (Gumati) for Hydro Electrical Project (sic).ò *Borok People (Indigenous People) and Their Life Condition of Twipra (Tripura) India*, an Undated handout by Borok People Human Right Organsiation, p.4.
[6] Menon, *Tripura District Gazetteer*, op cit.
[7] Menon, *Tipura District Gazetteer*, p.41.

intend to bring out the ironical, albeit unintended, consequence of this perhaps unintended attribution.

While watching the national award winning *Kokborok* movie, *Yarwng* (root)[8], a particular scene ï where the state (police) used óIndian elephantsô to demolish homes of those who refused to ómove upô ï made my mother say, *agi khwnama kokrok* (things we have heard of long time ago). Interestingly, the state-sponsored violence ï including the use of huge elephants ï is glossed over in the texts that contribute to the dominant discourse.[9] In this discourse, the negative consequences of the dam are population displacement (especially displacement of ótribalô) and ecological destruction. Displacement takes place ódue to formation of reservoirô.[10] Even what the reservoir submerged is merely óa huge swath of arable lands owned by the tribalsô.[11] They make displacement, a natural outcome of a dam, less unpleasant.

There is another narrative, a counter perspective of this submerged geography. This is a narrative of those who speak against the dominant discourse. Their concern, while memorialising state-sponsored violence, attends to violence of another kind, displacement of meaning, of an idea of place and submersion of a history. In these narratives the unpleasantness and the brutalities are dealt with directly, on its own terms. Displacement is always an outcome of violence ï forcible eviction by police,

[8] Kokborok is the language spoken by various Tripuri communities (Debbarma, Reang, Tripura, Jamatia, Uchoi, Noatia, Koloi etcé)The movie is about this particular dam and displacement of indigenous population. It won national award in 2010.
[9] These texts would speak of displacement of tribal and never the ugliness and brutalities of state sanctioned violence. Das Gupta, *Development ad Ecology*; Subhir Bhaumik, *The Dam and the Tribal*: Subir Bhaumik, *A Blueprint For Ethnic Reconciliation in Tripura: Decommissioning The Gumti Hydel Project For A Start*, <http://www.tripurainfo.in/Info/Archives/132.htm> (accessed February 2010).
[10] Malabika Das Gupta, *Development and Ecology*, p.2267.
[11] Subir Bhoumik makes a case for decommissioning of the dam (which has become non-functioning now) so that Bengalee-Hindus can buy peace in Tripura by giving back ótribalô their alienated land, see *A Blueprint for Ethnic Reconciliation in Tripura.*

demolition of homes/houses by elephants, loading them into crammed trucks, and forcible relocation into deplorable órehabilitationô camps.[12]

The other form of violence ï violence on memory and meaning of this place ï can be gleaned from two emblematic passages by two prominent intellectuals. First, Nanda Kumar Debbarma, a prominent Tripuri ethno-nationalist poet writes,

> Why were Raima-Sorma buried under water? They were not simply water bodies; they were embodiment of our stories, legends, and folk tales, they represent our continuities. This burial under water represents submerging of our history; our nation. Beginning from Dongoima-Dongoipha, to the present, our life, identity, connected to these landscapes.[13]

Similarly Bikas Rai Debbarma, another ethno-nationalist writer captures the poetics of this landscape in terms of erasure and loss.

> Raima! You are today
> A new named Gumoti
> You were once
> A daughter of Bolong, Koromoti
>
> Each word, our history youôve woven
> This landôs footprints, we inherited
> As water rises
> Our past submerges. [14]

What matters in these two emblematic passages is that a particular geography becomes the outstanding site of raking up bitter memories and constructing different identity of place. These bitter (rival) memories and identity of Tripura run counter to the state-promoted idea of Tripura, its vision of harmonious land of ótribal and non tribalô. Such counter narratives, by Tripuri ethno-nationalists, lay emphasis on

[12] Nagendra Jamatia (2003), who organized the displaced people for compensation, recollects the event as destruction of not rich ecology, but rich Tripuri villages from where people refused to move until forcible eviction by police, CRPF and huge elephants. See ñRaimani Twi Mokolni Mwktwiò (translation: Raimaôs water is eyesô tears), in *Mukumu*, Kokborok Hukumu Mission: Agartala, pp.88-90.

[13] Nanda Kumar Debbarma.2001. *Rung* (Part 1), Hachuk Khorang Publication: Agartala. Translated from Kokborok by the researcher. (Appendix II).

[14] Bikash Rai Debbarma.2001. ñDungur Siring Sorohò in *Chongpreng Yakhrai Bou-Wi*, Kokborok Hukumu Mission: Agartala. Translated from Kokborok by the researcher from lines 5-8 and 12-15. (Appendix III).

(including population displacement) displacement of history, memory and a particular idea of place woven around experiences of fragmentation, disjunction and estrangement.

Why was this particular geography chosen as a site for counter memory production and cultural investment by the ethno-nationalists? It can be argued that the dam, the displacement of local population and the geography it submerged makes it convenient strategic spot for reproduction of counter memory. Without denying this aspect ï that these strategic ethno-nationalist investments occur after dam had been constituted ï I wish to situate the ideology into dim, silenced (not silent) past.

In chapter two, I had argued that Tipperah as a stable political centre emerged only after two events: controlled over sedentary, permanent surplus producing Bengalee population; and incorporation of Indic cosmography ï invention of a Hindu past. The invention of Hindu past retrospectively projects its dynastic existence to the Hindu mythologies, a project made possible by incorporating Hindu Brahmins. This shift in genealogy also coincides with the shift from orality (oral rendition of genealogy) to literality (writing). The shift in genealogy erased the importance of *Dongoima-Dongoipha* (genealogy from where Tripuris trace their origin) from history, and thereby sacred/stigmatised space, in the eye of the state, is reconstituted.[15] Therefore, this particular stretch of land, as a sacred geography, had already been silenced by the political elites during the precolonial period.

[15] As mentioned in chapter two the court chronicle ñRajmalaô opens with an imaginary king complaining to gods for making him a king of unholy land (of ónudeô boisterous peopleô who eat all kind of flesh ï elephant, horse, mouse, cat, tiger, dog, snake etc..) and his yearn for holy places (Mathura, Gaya, Kasi, Hariduara, Kurukshetra, Ayudhya) and sacred rivers (Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Saraswati) situated elsewhere. This text written during the fifteen century can be read as reconstitution of sacred geographies after the incorporation of Indic cosmography.

However, the importance of this geography, as a sacred place essentially connected to history of Tripuris, existed as simultaneously real and abstract in the imagination of Tripuris.[16] It is this aspect of being real and abstract the ethno-nationalist draws upon in order to re-produce a rival history and geography. The dam and the geography it submerged are then articulated as erasure of that history and geography (including identity) and thereby give meaning to their struggle against the Bengalee-Hindus. The irony, I pointed out earlier, lies in the image of state police (Bengalee-Hindu) and elephant (symbolising Indian state) defiling indigenous sacred geography. This image serves to legitimate the ethno-nationalist perception of (Tripuraôs) modernity as a colonial condition. This perception has had tremendous influence in the making of Tripuri identity and the ensuing politics of identity, including Tripuri arm insurgency since late 1970s.

A dam is not merely constituted on the surface of geography; it strips that geography of meaning ï a meaning outside certain ways of seeing Tripura. Yet still a geography of meaning, alive and potent source of rival imaginings of place. The dam and the geography it submerged is a graphic representation of modern Tripuri identity politics. In the eye of the ethno-nationalists, the submersion symbolised estrangement of Tripuris from their geography, a homeland disjuncted by another idea of homeland.

[16] *Dongor* or *Dumbur, Raima* and *Saima* are real in the sense that these rivers are still sites of sacred rites; and abstract in their connection to mythic tales and legends which conjures up a different geographies of belonging.

A Brief History of Tripuri Ethno-nationalism

It can be said that the desire to view modern mapped Tripura as a home by mutually exclusive modern political identity groups is a recent phenomenon. As argued in the previous chapter, politics over this small stretch of geographical terrain was constituted by palace discourse of ómy landô ï where the ideology of a collective discourse óour landô could be imperative of rival geographical discourse. Precolonial state (Tipperah) was founded upon strategic bound-up of state-core, extractive space and mobile hill space. The identity of the ruling house defined as ólunar raceô with elaborate invention of Hindu past served as a resource for distance (from Tippera and Bengalee) and antiquity. The kingly injunction, ómy landô, foreclosed emergence of any other form of spatial collective loyalty.

The shift in territorial ideology ï from ómy landô, where hill-ness and plain-ness merged, to mutually exclusive homelands ï conjures up interesting topographies of modern Tripuri identity. In chapter two I have conceptualised identity Tippera as ópenô, defined absolutely in relation to propinquity to the state core. Moving out or away from a certain geographical realm that constituted immediate to the state core was interpreted as becoming the ómobileô other. Conversely, moving into the fortified state-core was interpreted as civilisation. Exactly when does this portability of identity becomes non-portable is difficult to say. Geographically speaking, the various disjunctions in space, I have pointed out in this study, i.e. colonial separation of hill and plain (1761); fixing the mobile Kukis inside new named place óLushai Hillsô; and dissolution British-India and disruption of Manikya dynasty, shaped the landscape of

modern Tripura. Representations (by Tripuris) of this new spatial grid, within the new spatial formations, offer glimpses of ethno-nationalism struggle with identity and place.

A brief history of Tripuri ethno-nationalism may serve to set the background for investigation of its topographies ï its epistemology of place. This history can be broadly discussed in two phases marked by breaks and as well as connections. The first phase (1940-1965) is constituted and defined by complex process of appropriation of the spatial discourse of Tripura. It marked the destigmatisation of the ôTipperahô by re-marking the identity of the ruler. The second phase is constituted by multiple conditions of invested coloniality ï discourse of (postcolonial) Tripura as colonial space.

1940-1965 ï Dislocations

It can be argued that thinking ôTripuriô politically or imagining of the community as ópoliticalô collective becomes perceptible during 1940s. The following conversation between the last Raja of Tripura and his *Binondia* is illustrative of the nascent ideological shape of politics of identity and place.[17]

> *ñOn seeing the Raja in good mood, I said to him.*
>
> *Binondia: Maharaj Dharmavtar, you are not a Raja of the Tripuris.*
>
> *Bir Bikram: Why not Ram Kumar? My Blood is of Tripuri; I am a Tripuri.*

[17] This conversation was narrated to Sudhanwa Debbarma (then a student at Agartala) by Ram kumar Thakur, a *Binondia*. The title or post *Binondia* is the intermediary between the hill subjects and the Raja of Tripura. He is appointed by the Raja. Sudhanwa Debbarma later became a prominent member of Jana Siksha Samity and later Tripur Jatiyo Gana Mukti Parishad. Sudhanwa Debbarma.1997. *Ki kore Rajnitite Joriye Porlam* (How I came to be entangled in politics: Translation mine), Tripura Darpan: Agartla, pp.6-7.

Binodia: If this is the case, then how many Tripuris are employed in the administration? Why there are fewer educated Tripuris? All your ministers are of different race.

Bir Bikram: Ram Kumar, I cannot argue with you on this.

And the Raja, angry, walked back to the palace". He later, returned and grasped my hands and said,

ñ*If the Tripuris are educated, one day they would chase me out of my palace*.ò

This encounter is symptomatic of the significant shifts taking place in the realm of identity and place. One, old spaces of power or the spatial matrix of mobile hill space, extractive space and state-core, the bound-up upon which the state has been structured is loosened up. The production of ótherô that constitutes the educated employees of the state disrupts that old spatial matrix. Two, old arrangement/classification of population also gets disrupted. Movement towards the state core, the fortified capital, no longer constituted moving away from the spatial realm of the Tippera. Ram Kumar Thakur (*thakur* as a suffix denoting civilised hill man who has moved into the state core) destabilises that meaning by re-centering that stigmatised hill identity inside the fortified state-space ï the identity of the ruler re-marked and contested.

This destabilising shift had immense social and political implications. Most importantly, the tearing away of órealm of the Tipperahô and the appearance of that particular stigmatised identity within the formerly non-Tippera spaces, rendered political the category ôTripuriô. More tellingly, it signified the emergence of a small group of (formerly Tippera) elite who refused to be incorporated into the ideological core of the Manikyan dynasty which had sustained its rule since its inception in the fifteenth century. Instead, by questioning the palace of its identity, they attempted to subvert the old spaces of rule in order to begin to constitute new politics of identity.

This new politics of identity hinged on twin ideological underpinnings: one, production of knowledge of the Manikyan rule and its history of rule as anti-Tripuri, therefore, full fledged modern Tripuri nation can come only via destruction of this rule; two, they constituted a new discourse of Tripura as a specific place, as a site for struggle for a specific category of people, produced for the first time racialised narratives of the ótherô. The old idea of Tripura as open geography (despite colonial cartographic operations it still allowed movement of goods, capital and population) gets supplanted in this complex process of redefining Tripura to situate the insider/outsider. Within these two ideologies I would like to locate the Janasiksha Samity (JSS) and its avatar Tripur Jatiyo Mukti Parishad (later rechristened as Gana Mukti Parishad after merger with Communist Party of India).

Jana Sikshya Samity (JSS) founded in 1944, can be described as the first and most important ethno-nationalist outfit during this period. The organisation spearheaded the movement for mass education. Its manifesto envisioned itself as a champion of ótribalô emancipation ï a task in which óeducated and half educatedô were commanded compulsory participation in order to raise their society from the ócurse of illiteracy and poverty that have descended on the tribal society of Tripura during the thirteen hundred and fifty years of princely regime in the stateô.[18] As early as 1948, JSS established 400 schools; as many as 300 recognised by the state, a credit largely attributed D. A. Brown, then Education Minster of the state.

What is particularly novel about JSS (in the political history of Tripura) is its appropriation of ôTripuriô as a political category. The numerous political formations,

[18] Manifesto quoted in Bijan Mahanta.2004. *Tripura in the Light of Socio-Political Movements since 1945*, Progressive Publishers: Kolkata, p.22.

which emerged in Tripura during this period, were confined to the capital and urbane localities. Mostly, they comprised of deputed communist cadres from Bengal or progressive (read Indian National Congress sympathisers) Bengalee leaders fighting for political reforms. JSS struggled with and within differently radicalised geographies ï the neglected hills, the landscapes feared by the ruling elites for its historically recalcitrant social structure. It was precisely this radicalisation of hitherto feared geographies by JSS which troubled the old spatial arrangement of power.

After the death of Bir Bikram Manikya in 1947, JSS opposition to large scale settlement of Bengalee-Hindus from East Pakistan and the new government, the leaders of JSS were proscribed by the state along with the communists. In 1948, after the infamous Golaghati massacre, the leaders went underground and founded the Tripur Jatiyo Mukti Parishad, and carried out armed struggle against the state. The state responded by declaring martial law in the entire hills in order to stump out opposition. The leaders of this organisation drew upon its already established mass support.

The period also saw proliferation of numerous other organisations wedded to ideological opposition of Bengalee-Hindu dominance in the state administration and their rehabilitation in the state ï Sengkrak, Paharia Union, Adivashi Sangh. Though the mass base of these organisations is questionable, they, apart from JSS, represented modern political construction of the Bengalee-Hindu as ótother-outsiderô. The Seng krak was most militant and vocal in its advocacy of óexpulsionô of Bengalee refugees from Tripura.

Coloniality re-invented: Tripuri ethno-nationalism since 1965

In the late 1960s Tripuri identity politics took a different shape, marked by ideological breaks and connections from earlier discourse of Tripura. This new identity politics was represented by three new political formations: Tripura Upajati Jubo Samity (political party), Tribal Student Federation (now Twipra Student federation), and Tripura National Volunteer (armed underground group). These groups have been particularly responsible for their ideological investment in, what can be described as, re-invention of colonial condition. Unlike previous narrative of Manikyan rule as ófeudalistcô, the past (prior to merger with India) was imagined as ógloriousô.[19] The post-merger is narrated as colonisation by Bengalee-Hindus from Bangladesh, seen as political project of the Indian state.

These departures informed their political rhetoric and struggles. During the entire decade of 1970, identity politics in Tripura was marked by radically polarised confrontations between ethno-nationalist fronts and the state. Their demands for deportation of foreigners and implementation of Sixth Schedule (District Council) eventually led to the infamous 1980 ethnic riots between Bengalees and Tripuris.[20] The 1980 ethnic riots, now popularly known as ódangaô, became an important point of reference, a marker of time, especially of the last century, in the every day social

[19] For example,Twipra Studentsô Federationôs anthem *Kusung Kusung* harps on Tripura as mighty expansive kingdom of the Tripuri people.

[20]The communal riot split the state bureaucracy and police, and also the communist party along ethnic lines, see Ranajay Karlekar.1985. ñThe Tripura Riots, 1980ò, in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XX, No. 34, (August 24), p.1428. Agore Debbarma (1980)claims that the police actually engaged in selective killing of Tripuris in his *Tripurai Gana Hottai Jonyo Mandai ki Ek Matro Saskhi?* (Trans:Is Mandai the only example of killings in Tripiura?), Self Publlished: Agartala. See also Agore Debbarma.2002. *Tripurar Danga: Ekti Prajaluchona* (Trans:An analysis of communal conflict in Tripura) Self Published.

discourse. Events came to be plotted and understood as pre-danga or after-danga. The ugliness and intensity of the conflict was well-portrayed by Jagadish Gan-Chaudhury,

> The flame of fire spread very rapidly from village to village burning thousands of houses and huts, cattle and crops. Numerous villages were laid waste. Lakhs of people were rendered homeless. Properties, both moveable and immoveable, worth several crores were destroyed, damaged, burnt, looted and captured. Hundreds were murdered. Women were raped. All contemptible crimes in human history were committed. Both communities were affected. In every community there are mischief-mongers (sic).[21]

In the succeeding decades, after 1980 ethnic riot, Tripura has been converted into a killing field: intermittent communalised killings between Tripuris and Bengalees; armed clashes between insurgents and military.[22] After 1980, ethnic violence of that scale and magnitude did not take place. Nevertheless, the period between 1998 and 2001 was marked by another phase of ethnic violence. Many believed the violence to be engineered by proscribed Tripuri armed group, National Liberation Front of Twipra (NLFT). There were other political events within which this phase of violence may be located.

In 1982 TUJSô brief stint in power as a coalition partner of Indian National Congress in many ways discredited the leaders. The party suffered a vertical split with more extremist among them breaking away to form their own parties with claims to pursue the unachieved abandoned goals of the parent organisation. Debobrata Koloi formed

[21] Gan Choudhury, *A Political History of Tripura*, p.64.
[22] According to South Asian Terrorist Portal the total number of civilians killed by the insurgents during 1998 to 2001 was 1145. The highest was, 453 in 2000. From 1998 to 2002 over 50000, mostly Bengalees have been displaced (www.internal-displacement.org) and according to centre for International Development and Conflict Management so far the ethnic conflict in Tripura have claimed estimated 1, 0000 ï 12000 lives (www.cidcm.umd.edu). For a vivid narration of the killings and eviction of Bengalees see Manas Paul, *The Eye Witness: Tales From Tripura's Ethnic Conflict,* op cit.

the Tripura Hills Peoples Party and Harinath Debbarma, the former chief of TUJS formed the Tripura Tribal National Conference. However, these parties failed to make any impact on the state politics. The parent organisation was able to retain some visibility but lost its credibility and standing among the Tripuris.

The ensuing political sterility disenchanted and disillusioned many radical youths (with mainstream politics) who had taken active part in the articulation and mobilisation of Tripuris during the 1970-1980. As a result, the beginning of 1990s saw a proliferation of several insurgent groups of which All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) and National Liberation Front of Twipra (NLFT) emerged as the leading fronts in extremism.[19] These two organisations carried out eviction (of Bengalees) programs from Tripuri inhabited areas since 1994 and by 1999 certain areas came to be designated as óliberated zonesô. There is a widely held belief that NLFT was the intellectual author behind the formation of Indigenous Peoplesô Front of Twipra ï comprising of all the splintered factions (of TUJS).[23] IPFT carried out campaign for ousting of óforeignersô and toppling of órefugee governmentô. IPFT came to power in the District Council election (2000) and introduced hugely controversial policies: re-writing of *kokborok* in Roman script instead of Bengalee (Devanagiri) script; invention or as they called it órevivalô of Tripuri new year óTringô and; re-use of Tippera Era as the official calendar.[24]

[19] Both the groups drew their support from the disenchanted youths who played active role during the 1970s and 80s.
[23] Immediately after capturing power in the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council, IPFT re-named itself as Indigenous Nationalist Party of Twipra in order to contest the Assembly elections. After successive defeats the party met the same fate as TUJS.
[24] Tipperah Era was the official calendar used during Manikya dynasty. In 1963 this calendar was removed from official use by the state government and replaced it with Bengalee calendar. It is believed that Tipperah Era was established by Tripuri King Hamtor Fa or Himti Fa to commemorate his victory against Bengal ruler in 590 A D.

Presently Tring have become important symbol of Tripuri ethno-nationalism.[25] It historicises a possible event, summons or collectively recollects a different history and geography in order to produce modern Tripuriôs óOtherô, especially the Bengalee-Hindus. As evident from above, Tripuri identity politics is constituted by production of spatial differentiation ï Tripuris and Bengalees as occupying separate geography, distinct discontinuous places. The disruption of this discontinuous space is conceptualised as the condition of coloniality ï Bengalee-Hindus as other outsider dominating the political and economy of Tripura. Tring isolates an (possible) event in history in order to re-mark that boundary, and thereby frame a colonial situation. Coloniality is made real, in their everyday imaginaries and experiences of displacements from an imagined history and geography. It is precisely, this geography, I wish to prise open.

Tripura as Contested Place: Topographies of ôTripuriô

In the previous chapter, I had argued how the postcolonial Tripura is imagined as a place within already existing Indian nation by the new political elite of the state. This imagining coincided with Bengalee-Hinduôs reproduction of Tripura as a new home-space. This new territorial ideology becomes real only when their relationship to the place is naturalised ï when that óabstract ideological terrain and a concrete physical territoryô are ócross-mapped onto each to each otherô. It constructs a supposed continuity between present-day people and a past. There are others ways of constructing that ósupposed continuityô.

[25] The celebration of Tring (Tipperah Era New Year) is organised by Movement For Kokborok. There is no evident to show that Manikya rulers celebrated a new year for Tippera Era. This is a recent invention by ethno-nationalist. It commemorates a particular memory ï of victory against Bengal.

Modern identity groups employ diverse spatial technologies to articulate their relationship to place. In the previous chapter I showed how three spatial technologies were deployed in order to inscribe Bengalee-Hindu identity onto the landscape. These spatial technologies reproduced Tripura in the image of the new homeland. By retrospectively projecting the existence of these spaces they serve as markers of their presence since antiquity. How are these spaces contested by Tripuri ethno-nationalists? What are the spatial technologies deployed to re-inscribe their identity? What form does identity politics take within multiple mutually exclusive inscriptions?

Since the Bengalee-Hindu inscriptions are sanctioned and circulated by the modern state, the sites where difference is enacted, reproduced, and re-framed are always posited as spaces of loss, dislocation, estrangement and fragmentation of Tripuri identity and place. Tripuri ethno-nationalism inhabit, draw upon these estranged spaces. It is produced by these spaces; it also produces these spaces. It acquires meaning only within these spaces, outside of which it might have a life quite different from what is today. It is these spaces I now turn to.

In August 2006, a prominent member of Twipra Student Federation was taking me around Agartata (capital of Tripura). We were returning to the city from A D Nagar. Just before crossing the Howra Bridge he arched his eyebrow towards a large statue of Subhas Chandra Bose (as always on a galloping horse back and his index finger pointed) indignantly and muttered ôBengalee heroô. As we rode over the bridge he dared me to name the original indigenous name of the river. I maintained an inscrutable silence and smiled to hide my ignorance. ôOur forefathers called it *saidra'*, he uttered, in such a way as to scoff at my education from one of Indiaôs top

universities. Immediately, after crossing the bridge, the autorikshaw took a left swerve and we came by walled squared ground, an empty space, looking out of place. This particularly filthy looking place elicited revolting reaction (covering of mouth and nose) from our other co-passengers, including me. However, the filth-filled place, scavenging ugly pigs all over, evoked a reaction in him which is hard to name, ôthis is our kingsô *simlang* (cemetery).[26] I can tell, from his voice, that it pained him to see such a sacred space desecrated.

How does one interpret his structure of feelings towards these three present spatial realities at Agartala: statue of Bose, the river with changed name, and the desecrated *simlang*. What do these everyday sites/sights tell of the identity politics in Tripura? More importantly, how/why are these contested sites? There is a wide recognition of the connection between production of identity (especially territorial identity) and invention of particular sites of memory ï the creation and maintenance of particular view of place by inscribing that conception onto the public landscapes.[27] Every nation or for that matter, every ethnic groups produces its own places of memory. These three spatial realities are representative of the contestedness of Tripura.

Indigenous toponymies: inscribing ownership

[26] In this study I use the *kokborok* word *simlang* because the word do not differentiate between a grave and a place where dead is cremated. More importantly, *simlang* is not only a site where the dead is interred or burnt, it is a permanent resident of the *mang* (a Kokborok word for individuality/feelings/reality) of the dead. In Tripuri indigenous belief system death implies exit of the fola (spirit/soul); what is interred or burnt is the flesh, the *mang* is undestroyed.

[27] Maoz Azaryahu.1986.ñStreet Names and Political Identity: The case of East Berlinò, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Sage.Vol. 21, No. 4; Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson.2002. ñUnraveling the Threads of History: Soviet Era Monuments and Post-Soviet National Identity in Moscowò, *Annals of Association of American Geographers,* Vol. 92. No. 3; Arsney Saparov.2003. ñThe Alternation of Place Names and Construction of National Identity in Soviet Armeniaò, *Cahiers du Monde russe*, Vol. 44. No.1.

The Memorandum of Settlement, signed by Tripura state and Tripuri armed group All Tripura Tribal Force (ATTF) in 1993, among other things includes two interesting points: One, places to be renamed in their original indigenous names; and two, conversion of Ujjayanta Palace (seat of former ruling house of Tripura and presently Tripura Legislative Assembly) into a historical monument.[28] This urge, by Tripuri armed ethno-nationalist, to reinstate indigenous toponymies flags off a spatial strategy sculpted as struggle over loss geographies. This sets off uncompromisable politics, where erasure of new place-names constitutes a refusal of the dominant, state-promoted idea of Tripura. It unsettles signs and memories that legitimate ónon-tribalô in the state-promoted vision of ótribal and non-tribalô Tripura. I will elaborate further.

The state, in order to produce Tripura as a home for the Bengalee-Hindu, drew upon considerable amount of existing Indic place names. As discussed in the previous chapter, these names were believed to be connected to Indic cosmography and therefore these Hindu sacred geographies made possible retrofitting a home onto unknowable past. The fact that these places were conferred sacredness by the postcolonial state did not prevent the invention of Bengalee presence since antiquity.[29] Nevertheless, what I wish emphasise is that place-names can be viewed as sites for investment of certain kind of memories, carries particular identity, and makes real different geographies. In Tripura, these place-names are deeply embroiled in the struggle for identity and place.

[28] Other important agreements include restoration of alienated land to ótribalsô, and deportation of óforeign nationalsô. *Memorandum of Settlement*, Tripura State Governement and All Tripura Tribal Force Accord, 1993.

[29] For example the unokoti (carvings of Hindu deities on rocks at Kailasahar) which lay in ruins till its discovery (by English survey party) and restoration in 1921 is narrated as always been sacred site of Hindus and therefore the place as always been part of India. G C Chauley.2007. *Art Treasures of Unokuti, Tripura*, Ajam Kala Prakasham: New Delhi, pp.9, 31.

In the words of Lefebvre, óA revolution (a major social transformation) that does not produce new space has not realised its full potentialô.[30] Postcolonial Tripura, as a different spatial formation, posited production of its own spaces which made itself real in every day lived experiences of the people. This character is not unique to Tripura, nor is my analysis of place-names as sites of memory and identity new. There are ample examples of how new regimes or polities, every where, engaged in re-naming of places, and have been focus of brilliant scholarship.[31] These studies pay particular attention to the relationship between place-names, including street names, and political ideology. These names are óconvenient and popular political symbolsô, óreflects and manifest a certain political identityô, in that, they help to form a desired political consciousness among population.[32] Between the meaning engraved in the word displaced and the new meaning imposed lies politics of appropriation. The place acquires new identity implicated in the new ideology of the state. Nihal Perera aptly described this practice as ósemantic appropriationô, in his analysis of how the British colonial power erased the imprints of former Portuguese and Dutch rule in Sri Lanka.[33]

In postcolonial Tripura, within the political ideology of new state, the indigenous toponymy not only symbolised rival geographies, but were viewed as a threat the new history and geography of the place. Therefore, simultaneous to re-invention of Hindu

[30] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space,* p.54.
[31] For example Maoz Azaryahu makes an extensive survey of street names altered under the regime of Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED) in the East Germany. The erased names reflected the political ideology of the Nazi which were in fact had replaced the names that up to 1918 reflected of Kaiserreich. *Street names and Political Identity,* op. cit. p.581; See also Arsney Saparov, *The Alternation of Place Names and Construction of National Identity in Soviet Armenia,* p.179.

[32] Azaryahu, *Street Names and Political Identity,* p.581.
[33] Quoted and discussed in Nira Wikramasingheôs, ñThe Imagined Spaces of the Empireò, in Cathrine Burn and Tariq Jazeel (eds).2009.*Spatialising Politics: Culture and Geography n Postcolonial Sri Lanka,* Sage:Los Angeles, London, Singapore, New Delhi and Washington DC, p.31.

sacred sites, the indigenous place-names were erased by ossifying the new names, written and made official. Rabindra Kishore Debbarma, a writer, noted that ôBengalee surveyors would come to the village, enquire the name of the place, he would then translate the name to Bengalee and record itõ.[34] These acts have to be understood within that political ideology of producing a discourse of right over a territory ï a moral right to own and inhabit a territory.[35]

These new place-names disrupts that old topographies of identity ï the connection between identity (not necessarily modern identity) and place ï allowing new connections and linkages to appear as natural and given. However, the indigenous names continue to exist in the every day discourse of the other inhabitants, as an oral memory, always as a potent source of rival imaginings of the place. Tripuri ethno-nationalist struggle, to reclaim the indigenous toponymy, converts these surfaces into sites of different memory production and circulation. Arseny Saparov provides a gist of politics of place-names.[36]

> Ethnic groups that have preserved their national identity are especially sensitive about maintenance of the national landscape. Often the national toponymy is the only witness to the fact that a territory belongs to a particular ethnic group. Most definitions of any ethnic community ï tribe, nationality, nation necessarily mention the common living space of that ethnic group. Within that territory a national toponymy has been formed ï a system of geographical names in the native language of the indigenous population.[37]

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[34] Interview with the researcher 2008. For an extensive list of the indigenous place-names which have been e-named places see Rabindra Kishore Debbarma.1998. *Tripurar Gram* (Trans: villages of Tripura) Tripura Darpan: Agartala.

[35] Naming events, actions and places by Israel as a project of crafting a national identity and claiming of the territory of Palestine for Jewish homeland and state. See Julie Peteet.2005. ñWords as Intervention: Naming in the Palestine: Israel Conflictò, *Third World Quarterly,* Vol. 26, No. 1 (The Politics of Naming: Rebels, Terrorists, Criminals, Bandits and Subversives), pp.153-173.

[36] For a similar reading see RDK Herman.1999. ñThe Aloha State: Place Names and the Anti-Conquest of Hawaiiò, *Annals of Association of American Geographers,* Vol. 89, No. 1 (March 1999), pp.76-102.

[37] Saparov, *The Alteration of Place Names and Construction of National Identity,* p.179.

Place-names, as important markers of territorial identity, are sites of contested memory and construction of particular identity of place. The identity of postcolonial Tripura, as a specific type of place, was produced via appropriation and invention of sacred spaces (drawing on connection between place-names and their connection to Hindu cosmographies), and also conscious transformation (read erasure) of existing indigenous toponymy. Tripuri ethno-nationalist identity politics, the restitution of indigenous toponymy, which asserts a different reading of modern landscapes of Tripura flags of politics of uncompromising spaces. The re-naming of *Saidra* as Howra (a principal river in West Bengal state), besides being an affront to my guideôs ethno-nationalist sensibilities, it reproduces his ethno-nationalism ï where ethno-nationalism is struggle with estranged geography.

Marks of identity: contesting memory

The towering statute of Subhas Chandra Bose, on the bank of the Saidra/Howra, is not the only memorial that enacts postcolonial Tripura as a specific place. The city landscape is ólitteredô with, virtually, statues, memorials and monuments of historical figures drawn from Indian national struggle who are largely from Bengal.[38] The visual of a youthful statue of Khudiram Bose, on the entrance of Ujjayanta Palace (presently the Legislative Assembly of the state), and Rabindranath Tagore and Ambedkar on the precinct of the palace signals two ideological agendas ï appropriation of the

[38] In July 1, 2010 during my field trip I accompanied Anthony Debbarma (BPHRO), Wasok Debbarma (former president of TSF) and Bekreng (former prominent leader of NLFT) on their visit to a malaria stricken village (in Kachanpur) near Mizoram border in North Tripura District. Before reaching Kanchanpur we came by a small market place, and a white bust of Baghat Singh (the unmistakable moustache and the hat) above a glistening pillar caught our attention. Anthony muttered to himself and shook is head in disbelief and asked to no one particular, *Chini Raja rok biang kwma kha sa*? (Where have our kings/heroes disappeared). As our discussion suddenly shifted to the issue of memorials my co-passengers chatted about building memorials of ór heroesô and compete with the ólittersô that dot Tripuraôs capital, Agartala.

historical site to the Indian national imagination; and, in the eye of Tripuri ethno-nationalist, óBengalinisationô of the indigenous historical sites. The (almost) absence of erstwhile Manikya rulers (appropriated as Heroes by Tripuris ethno-nationalists) from the memorial landscape of the city tells of different story. What difference does this absence make in óthinkingô space? What does it tell of the relationship between place and identity?

There is a burgeoning literature which shares a common insight: monuments and memorials create and maintain a particular view of place ï they impress that conception onto the public landscape or inscribe a particular view of history on the landscape.[39] The politics of ómemorialsô work within the ideology of producing place and identity: and as óa marker of memory and historyé places of memory provides ideal way to trace the underlying continuities and discontinuities in (national) identity politicsô.[40] The underlying assumption is that a place of memory (memorials) makes real, in the everyday lived experiences of given population, the invented idea of place and identity. These sites symbolise connection with a particular idea of history of the place, entombs a specific memory, and performs rituals of commonality. I wish to flesh out, not withstanding these connections, a different reading of these sites and arrive at a radical take on the idea of Tripura.

A short recap would be appropriate. Immediately after the dissolution of British-India and disruption of the erstwhile ruling house of Tripura, a new idea of place needed production. This became critical for two reasons: integration to Indian union and

[39] The relationship between monuments and identity construction see Paul Stangl.2003. ñThe Soviet War Memorial in Treptowò, *Berlin, Geographical Review,* Vol. 93. No. 2, pp.213-236; Forest and Johnson, *Unraveling the Threads of History,* pp.524-547.
[40] Forest and Johnson, *Unraveling the Threads of History,* pp. 524-5.

rehabilitation of large scale Bengalee-Hindu refugees from severed East Pakistan. The new political elites aspired to resolve these two problems through appropriating Tripuraôs past: one, the invention of Hindu sacred toponymies and thereby imagining Tripura as a place within Indic cosmography; two, Bengalee-Hindus as originally subjects of Manikyan past (the proofs being control of large swathe of Bengal by Manikya rulers), and thereby making them legitimate citizens in the new spatial formation. What emerged from these appropriated past is the central idea of Tripura as historical place of harmonious óhill-man and plain-manô, reproduced in school text books. Why is this history not spoken through the sites investigated here? What I will demonstrate is that the óabsenceô marks a contradiction, and announces a problematic space.

The problem played itself out last year when the state government proposed a bill in the Assembly to rename the Agartala Airport after poet Rabindranath Tagore. The airport was built by Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya during 1940s and was used by the allied forces in the World War II. The very idea of commemorating and memorialising Tagore by naming the airport after him, instead of Bir Bikram Manikya who commissioned it, sparked off unprecedented opposition from Tripuri ethno-nationalist.[41] Between stateôs choice of Tagore and ethno-nationalists open espousal of Bir Bikram, to be commemorated and memorialised as a name of the significant site, lies troubling politics of identity and place. Despite conscious appropriation of past spaces of Manikyan rule by the new state, its inability to commemorate and memorialise that history subverts that produced connection. Consequently, this calls

[41] ñControversy over renaming of airport after Tagoreò, The Telegraph, July 13, 2010, <http://www.telegraphindia.com/1100713/jsp/northeast/story_12674635.jsp> (accessed July 15, 2010); ñmaharaja or poet? Controversy hits airport rechristeningò Sentinel, July 3, 2010 <http//:www.sentinelassam.com/northeast/story.php?> (accessed July 15, 2010).

for re-thinking these sites, not only as spaces commensurate with a particular invented place identity, but also as ambivalent sites that display dissonance with the very central ideology of a place.

In order to situate this dissonance, perhaps, it is necessary to look more closely at the way Tripuri ethno-nationalists have imagined their identity and Tripura. Earlier, I had pointed out the rather too quick after-lives Manikya history had had among Tripuri ethno-nationalists. First, Maniky rule and its history were disavowed by the early Tripuri elites, and especially the members of JSS. Second, Manikya rulers were glorified and its history was appropriated by the new ethno-nationalist groups like TUJS, TSF and TNV. The later ethno-nationalist retrofitted their nation onto hoary past and produced the present as a colonial condition ï the hoary past as their resource to rival geographical imagination. This brand of ethno-nationalist discourse wrought much havoc to the nascent modern stateôs control over Tripuraôs past. Rather, the past became an untouchable domain, whereby use of it entailed allowing larger space to Tripuri ethno-nationalist in the body politics of the state. The heightened politics of which has been the incandescent 1980 ethnic clashes, eviscerated common past and striated lived geographies.

The Manikyan period, and the Manikya rulers were nationalised by Tripuri ethno-nationalist ï an ideology (ethno-nationalism) chastised, stigmatised and delegitimised as óextremismô, óanti-nationalô and óanti-socialô since 1947. The ethno-nationalised history can no longer serve as symbolic agenda for the state-promoted vision of common past. The point is that incorporation of the nationalised historical figures would confer legitimacy to rival geographies ï a situation where even ócommon pastô

can no longer exist. These built environments, ironically, merely serve as markers of Bengalee-Hindu present in Tripura. They no longer tell of a shared past between ótribalô and ónon-tribalô.

The marks of identity, that interspersed the city landscape then, are non-commensurate with the postcolonial states ideology of place and identity. These marks dots the landscape, as rain battered statues, names memorialised in public places, martyr memorials and gravesites.[42] These do not necessarily tell only of identity of Tripura, but also symbolise the failure of that supposed identity.

A geography of loss: border and memory

So far, I have delineated two underlying threads of Tripuri identity politics in this chapter. First, its appearance within the state-core as disjunctive of former spatial grid. That is it re-constituted itself as (from a mobile category) non-stigmatised identity by re-marking the body of the ruler as ôTripuriô. Second, the sites where difference is enacted, reproduced, and re-framed are always posited as spaces of loss, dislocation, estrangement and fragmentation of Tripuri identity and place. I would like to push these arguments further, and by mapping politics of identity and place develop a critique of the way Tripuri ethno-nationalist have imagined Tripura.

Ruins usually are favourite sites or sights for nationalist or ethnic politics ï they are inevitably treated as signs (excreta) of hoary past and thereby affording its inheritors larger space in history. The site I am interested in is a desecrated *simlang* of former

[42] Some of these marks are statue of Khudiram Bose in front of Ujjayanta Palace (seat of Manikya dynasty, now state legislature).

rulers of Tripura whose claim to antiquity would embarrass even the mightiest or oldest of dynasties in India.[43] The dilapidated gravesite is located at Battala, one of the busiest corner-parts of Agartala, the capital of Tripura. The square-walled probably half the size of football field stays un-encroached despite degradation and crumbled wall. Inside the square, ruin edifices of rulers, stripped of embellishment stands in utter disrepair. This particular site marks an abnormal presence among the buzz of life all around ï the busy transport station, fruit vendors abutting out of every nook and the famous enclosed bootleg market (from electronic gadgets to clothes), illegal tiny bars hidden away everywhere makes the modern public memory of the place. Despite these symbols of modernity and their jostle for corners, this unsightly small space stays un-trespassed, albeit a dumping site of filth produced by these modern enterprises.

Despite the fact that dominant narrative of Tripura as a ôhomeôï produced, sanctioned and circulated by the postcolonial state ï has largely been dependent upon the character of Manikya dynasty, this particular site failed to achieve the status of a sacred in the eye of the state. This failure can be read in myriad of ways.[44] To the Tripuri ethno-nationalists, its social and symbolic role in the narrative of identity (both of the place and of the community) is best served by the very reality of a desecrated simlang.[45] The desecration objectifies the disjunction of a geography, the

[43] It traces its lineage to Mahabarat. One of the king is said to have participated in the famous kurukshetra battle.

[44] Many of the Bengalee passers-by and shop keepers (near the old *simlang*) I talked to, believe the place to be of importance to the royal family and its ruin as consequence of the familyôs negligence. However, when I broached this issue, side by side the issue of memorials to Anthony Debbarma, a human right activist, Washok Debbarma (former president of Twipra Studentsô Federation) and Bekreng (a former armed rebel), they interpreted the ruined *simlang* as symbolic of the ruin of their nation.

[45] Discussion with Subendu Debbarma, then general secretary of Twipra Student Federation on the question of why a sacred space is not commemorated by ethno-nationalist groups. He opined that,

visual of a ruin transforms the site into ethnicised sight and makes real the invented coloniality of a present. What is that disjuncted geography?

Tripuri ethno-nationalism is contingent upon a shared belief in certain idea of Tripuraôs past ï this particular place as inhabiting a continuous space, as an exclusive óhomeô. This notion of place incites not only radicalised everyday politics, but also serves as ideological resource for armed struggle, waged with the objective of restoration of lost geographies. The effect of this kind of geographical imagination is a text which brought communities and political parties onto the streets of Tripura ï the text in particular is Bijoy Kumar Hrankhawlôs speech at the Working Group of Indigenous Population at Geneva in 2002.[46] The text is a perfect embodiment of ethno-nationalist geographical ideologies which upsets dominant óofficialô narrative.[47] What does it embody?

First, the production of Bengalee-Hindu as the óother-outsiderô has largely been dependent upon the idea of precolonial ógloriousô Tripura as a history of Tripuri ónationô. An ethno-nationalist discourse of Tripura takes place only within this given geographical thought ï Tripura as always already a territorial entity that can be called a nation. The possibility of a text as óethno-nationalistô occurs via or from this geographically given. If the production of Tripura as a óhome of tribals and non-

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while gravesites of present Bengalee ministers become óflower gardenô, óur kingsô *simlang* becomes a municipality waste dumping site.

[46] The speech created a furore in Tripura with various political parties demanding his arrest. On the other hand various Tripuri groups threatened as mass movement in support of the speech. One of the important themes of the speech was terming the insurgency as movements for self determination by Indigenous people.

[47] Many other texts also significantly embody these ideologies. *A Brief History and Present Condition of Boroks of Twipra,* a handbook published by Borok Peopleôs Human Right Organisation (Not dated). Speech of Sukhendu Debbarma in the First session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 13-24 May, 2002, United Nations, H. Q New York; Speech of Kabita Jamatia in UN Commission on Human Right, Geneva, 1-5 March 2004.

tribalsô occurs by marking the category Tripuri below the spatio-temporal grid ï Bengalee-Hindu as occupying true time and Tripuris as behind time ï Tripuri ethno-nationalist literature upsets that spatio-temporal grid by retrofitting Tripuri identity to a geographically different and simultaneous history. Virtually every ethno-nationalist text embodies this geographical ideology, and plot meanings within this imaginings.

Despite the marks of colonial cartographic surgery or modernity on its mapped discontinuous ógeo-bodyô, the ôTripuraô in the ethno-nationalist geographical imaginings have always inhabited that discontinuity. The ethno-nationalist geography departs from dominant discourse of the modern border between Tripura-Bangladesh as simultaneously a marker of the ócommon enemyô and as erasure of distance between ótribal and non-tribalô.[48] In the ethno-nationalist discourse this border announces a drastically different political project: the production of ôTripuriô as inhabiting a continuous place ôTripuraô, and as a site for production of non-paradoxical spatio-temporal ópresentô and non-dichotomous simultaneity. It is the later I shall turn to here.

The ontology of ótribal and non-tribalô produced in the dominant narrative frames dichotomous simultaneity in the ópresentô of the ótribalô and the ótherô. It posits a present to be outside the spatio-temporal ónowô of the ónon-tribalô.[49] The ótribalô as occupying space-time óbehindô produces a dichotomous simultaneity between the

[48] In the previous chapter I discussed how the modern border between Tripura and Bangladesh is simultaneously erased and made real within the dominant discourse of Tripura as home of óBengalee-Hindusô.

[49] Harry Harootunianôs formulation is apt here, the ótrue timeô is kept by the modern west and colonized societies exist in a temporality different from modern. Quoted in Manu Goswami.2004.*Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space*, Permanent Black: Delhi p.28 (From Harry Harootunian.2000. *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, p. xvi).

ótribalô and ónon-tribalô. This way of conceptualising communities visualise the ótribalô in relation to the past of the ónon-tribalô; and difference is postulated as meaningful only within that linear grid.[50] The border in question is invested (by the ethno-nationalists) as a site for invention of a spatiality which champion a narrative of simultaneous time ï Tripuri as inhabiting ónowô of the ónon-tribalô; and separate territoriality.[51] Difference is then postulated as meaningful, not within the linear grid, but as occupying historically different óhomelandô and possessing a separate history. This narrative radically confronts the idea of a ósharedô home and history championed by the dominant narrative of Tripura.

Second, the text reproduces the postcolonial place as a geography of loss and geography of continuous struggle.[52] The dissolution of Manikya dynasty and the disruption of British-India, and the immigration of Bengalee-Hindu refugees into Tripura and accession into Indian dominion are conceptualised as events which coincide with the loss of a geography. The *simlang* is a powerful reminder of this loss ï a reminder not only of a glorious past, but also of suppressed present. The simlang is a signifier of ógloriousô history of Tripuri people and its crumbling edifices as signifier of suppressed present. The desecrated simlang is used as a site to invoke an event in the immediate past ï the crossing of border by Bengalee-Hindus ï as a

[50] For example, this makes possible for conceptualising communities practicing shifting cultivation in the hills as temporally behind communities engaged in plough and wet agriculture. James C Scott turns this argument on its head by arguing that agricultural practice is not ecologically given, but a political choice. Plough cultivation is not after to Shifting agriculture, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, p.191.
[51] In a widely distributed short leaflet *Twipra Era* Narendra Debbarma, a leading ethno-nationalist intellectual attempted to prove how Tripuriôs idea of time is similar to ñEnglishò and ñIndian Eraò. Though similarities can be assigned to notion of day, week, month and year; the comparison of hour, minute and second appears preposterous.
[52] The technique would be to list out every movement by the Tripuris since 1947 as movement for restoration of that geography. The inclusion of Tripura Janashiksa Samity and its avatar Ganamukti Parishad in the list is problematic for the singular reason that these two movements were antagonistic to the Manikya dynasty. For example see Mohan Debbarma.2008. *A Handbook On The Identity, History And Life Of Borok People*, Kokborok Sahitya Sabha:Agartala, pp.32-50.

colonising event. The ruin communicates the arrival of the ‘other-outsider’, the ‘refugees’, and announces the disjunction of a geography.

In this ethno-nationalist narrative of Tripura hides a gap – the production of Bengalee-Hindu as ‘refugee’ unsettles the appropriation of Manikya period as history of Tripuri ‘homeland’. It is impossible to study Manikya history outside the permanent surplus producing Bengalee peasantry – the alluvial plain as extractive space. Political identity of the Manikyan Tripura has been intricately interwoven with Bengal. Bengal was its political umbilical cord – it supplied Bengalee Brahmins, administrators, and Bengalee peasantry.

In this chapter, my intention had been to delineate spatiality inherent in the production of ‘Tripuri’. The disjunctions in space anticipate the possibility for imagining ‘Tripuri’ as a modern political category. I argued that identity ‘Tripuri’ fixes itself within a geographical grid by re-marking the state-core – no longer inhabiting a mobile stigmatised space. Finally, this particular identity inhabits estranged geographies – some of which are, silent indigenous toponymies, memories untold in the memorials and the ruined *simlang*. The border as an ambivalent space in the production of Tripura as home by the dominant narrative itself becomes a site invested in the construction of the ‘other-outsider’. The production of ‘Tripuri’, then, is contingent upon invention of a rival geography of Tripura – as a resource for rival ideologies and rival narrative. This narrative thrives as a peripheral epistemology of place, always confronting, challenging and subverting the dominant discourse.

Chapter VI

Conclusion: Geography and Identity Politics

The ways identity groups conceptualise place have enormous political implications. Much of the political turmoil around the globe stems from contested meaning of space and place. For example, the Palestine-Israel problem and the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict arise from contested meaning of territoriality and idea of space.[1] These conflicts involve questions of whose space it is, who has the right to inhabit it? Similarly the protracted armed conflicts in Indiaôs northeast region, Myanmarôs upland regions and Bangladeshôs Chittagong Hill tracts originate from and are sustained by rival geographical imaginings of these places by ethnic groups on the margins of modern Nation-States.[2] The central concern of this study has been a critical analysis of one such mode of rival geographical imaginations of a particular historicised place. More particularly, this study attempted to analyse how identity groups are able to claim a particular territory as óhomelandôï how they imagined space and its boundaries?

The Ambivalence of Place

I have argued that, the emergence of Tripura as a specific space ï a homeland ï is possible only after a series of disjunctions in space. I have pointed out the disjunctions of precolonial indigenous/Manikyan space and later the imperial/colonial space. Within the Manikyan spatial ideology, Tipperah as homeland of particular identity

[1] Both the conflicts are struggles for definition of a place as specific kind of homeland. They are produced through continuing process of construction and contestation of meaning of space. See Haim Bresheeth and Haifa Hammami.2006. ñIntroduction: Palestine and Israelò, *Third Text*, Vol. 20, Issue3/4, May/July, 2006, pp. 281-284. Nihal Perera.1998. ñTerritorial Space and National Identities: Representation of Sri Lankaò, *South Asia*, XX, pp. 23-50.

[2] Major armed ethnic movements in these three regions are Wa, Kachins and Karens in Burma, Jummas in Bangladesh and Naga, Tai-Ahom, Tripuri and Manipuri in India.

group did not constitute a meaningful point of reference. Before Tipperah became an identifiable place with its fortified capital at Rangamati (now Udaipur) ï during the reign of Ratna Fa/Manikya ï it was a moving place, an identifiable political centre, not necessarily an identifiable fixed geography. Tipperah as an identifiable fixed geography, albeit open borders, could emerge only after it removed its geographical impediments to state-making: the control of alluvial plains of Bengal which became its principal extractive space. By strategically locating its capital, the state-core, between the contested extractive space and the mobile hill space, Tipperahôs political and religious elites sustained a fairly successful state under a stable dynasty.

In the indigenous or Manikyan spatial arrangement, a hill subject was defined by his/her propinquity to the state-core. The hill population adjacent to the fortified state-centre ï relatively immobile, performing various roles for the dynasty ï were categorised as Tipperas. Identity ôTipperaô was unstable, ambiguous and geographically fluid. This is because identity ôTipperaô can be lost by enacting two movements. On the one hand, the open geography allowed movement away from the realm of ôTipperaô into the geographical realm of ôKukiô beyond the control of the state. The realm of the Kuki was the geography of ówild, ferocious savage hill peopleô who neither recognised overlordship of Tipperah ruler nor other premodern states in the region. The precolonial states could claim over this territory without actually subjugating communities inhabiting it. On the other hand, the open geography also allowed movement into the state-core and incorporation into the ideology of the ruling political class. The adoption of surname ôThakurô may be seen as one of the important rites of passage for incorporation or assimilation into the ideology of the state. This

change signified distance and difference from the previous identity: the stigmatised hill identity.[3]

When the British moved into the region in the Nineteenth century, they introduced new geographical grids of places and population, which in many ways, disjuncted earlier Manikyan grid of nearness and farness. The map was the most powerful technology of imposition of these new geographical grids. The operation of colonial power required clearly marked or defined borders within which the political power was vested upon a recognised government. As the British-India begun defining and drawing boundaries it led to intractable conflicts with the Rajah of Tipperah. In fact, the period 1820-1920 can be described as period of ôboundary disputeô between British-India and Tipperah. The Manikya ruling house refused to accept the lines defined by British-India as its original boundary till its dissolution in 1947.

Prevailing scholarship on political history of Tripura would study these border disputes as outcomes of disagreement of exact location of the actual border.[4] A study of British-India and Tipperah relationship, so far, merely records quarrels between the two states. This study attempted to understand these disputes as clash between indigenous spatial arrangement and colonial or modern spatial arrangement, therefore a conflict of spatial ideologies. Boundary disputes are after to the concept of ôborderô: a boundary which could be disputed by two parties was absent. It was a conflict of

[3] In Agartala (which has been Tripuraôs capital since 1760) a fairly large number of Tripuris use the surname óDebbarmanô instead of ôDebbarmaô. The ónô differentiates Tripuris who are still in the hills derogatorily designated as óPahariô and Tripuris who have adopted education and civilization (read Hinduisation). For a reading on Hinduisation of Tripuri society see Suren Debbarman. 2006.ò A Short Account of Tripuri Societyò, Jnan Bichitra: Agartala, pp. preface and 9-41.

[4] For example see Sahadev Bikram Kishore Debbarma.2002. *Tripura State Eastern Boundary Dispute*, op cit. Also see Hirendra Kumar Sur. 1986. *British Relation with the state of Tripura, 1760-1947,* Tripura Tribal Research Institute: Agartala (reprint).

two, mutually antagonistic, discourses of space: the indigenous conception of Tipperah and the western conception of it. After all, there is no such thing as an ‘actual’, ‘original’ or ‘natural’ boundary. Moreover, instead of recording the disputes as quarrels over actual boundary a more useful question would be why did they desire a border at a particular ‘there’ and not ‘there’?

Many factors go into the consideration of a certain area as actual border by a given state. In mountainous geography, with scarce population, two factors become vital in deciding a particular area as borderland: control over population and control of strategic trading points. A careful reading of reports of colonial surveyors and administrators in the region reveals a huge contradiction between their claims of search for ‘actual boundary of Tipperah’ and the desire for control of human power (especially Bengalee peasants) and strategic trade routes or points. Human power, specifically surplus producing settled cultivators, was the scarcest of commodities in the region. Tipperah and British-India quarrel over control of Bengalee peasants highlights serious politics, at times confusing. For example, Kukis (who were yet to become ‘wild’ and ‘savage’ in the colonial discourse) raids of Bengalee village within British-India and later Tipperah’s boundary, demonstrated the indeterminacy and ambivalence of new borders.[5] These colonial borders were laden with antiquity in the discourse of identity politics and creation of the ‘other-outsider’ during the postcolonial period.

[5] In 1860s when the Kukis started raiding Bengalee villages in ‘British Tipperah’ and ‘Hill Tipperah’ there was much confusion about the subject status of Kukis (the English blamed Tipperah Rajah for his failure to control his subjects) and Bengalee peasants in Hill Tipperah. The raids on Bengalee peasants in Hill Tipperah were considered as raid on subjects of British-India.

New geographical knowledge produced modern mapped Tripura. But this place was still a space within the British-India colonial geographical imagination. It was not outside the imperial space. Therefore the prevailing discourse that Tripura had never been colonised, and that, it was an independent territorial entity within which Manikyan rulers exercised sovereignty is an unquestioned epistemology. The need for surplus producing subjects precluded any discourse of ómy homelandô. A mapped Tipperah was still an open place, yet to be inscribed with discourse of homeland by a particular group. In other words, a link between the mapped place and an idea of people has not been constructed. As a mapped place within the imperial geography ï a locatable space in the imperial map ï discourse of Tipperah was still discourse of ómy landô, rather than óour landô. Although a new system of identification of certain people as ôTipperaô was set in motion (through colonial anthropology and later reflected in census) politics around this identity was yet to emerge.

Identity Politics as Politics of Place

Before identity ôTipperaô is employed as a political category, as a symbol around which modern politics of mobilization is possible, it must destabilise the ultimate source of its stigmatisation: the fortified state-core of the Manikyas. After all, the foundation of Manikya dynasty, its power and authority, had its genesis in the stigmatisation of the geography of Tipperah and its inhabitants. The separation of Manikya and Tippera as a demarcation between the sacred and the profane, the civilised and the wild required disjunction before it could become a source of pride, glory, reason, unreason and loyalty. This final disjunction took during 1940s, a symbolic example was the confession by the last Manikya ruler, ómy blood is of

Tripuri, I am a Tripuriô. This re-marking of the identity of the Rajah re-constituted new spaces of Tripuri identity.

This embarrassing confession by the Rajah not only marks significant departure from earlier conception of identity ôTripuriô, but it also reproduced and re-worked conception of place ôTripuraô. The colonial cartographic representation of Tripura opened up conceptual gap between the land and the ruler, a gap which incited new ethno-nationalist politics of ôour peopleô.[6] This new politics was politics of place or struggle over place, because the nascent ethno-nationalist ideology ôour peopleô was simultaneously ideology of ôour landô. They replaced earlier discourses of ômy landô and ômy peopleô with new discourses of ôour peopleô and ôour landô. However, this new identity politics was challenged by other new emerging conception of land and people after the dissolution of British-India.

Between the death of Bir Bikram Manikya (May 1947) and the signing of Instrument of Accession by the Regent Queen (October 1949), Tripura witnessed two years of political liminality. While the Regency fled to Shillong, capital of Assam (now capital of Meghalaya) the political elites in Tripura, divided on ethnic lines, virtually turned the capital of the state into a feared landscape. The political uncertainty and power vacuum spawned new contesting power centres and spanned battlefields. Although Tripuraôs position on merger was still unclear, there was already steady inflow of Bengalee-Hindus from East Pakistan. Various Tripuri organisations opposed

[6] For example as student at Agatala during the 1940s Sudhanwa Debbarma for the first time left his village and got to ôroamô other Tripuri villages. In his memoir he writes, his first visit to places like Golagati and Takarjala (villages which were in fact not far from his village Sutarmura) there was something called ôour peopleô. Before this visit his identity was confined to his village. He did and could not think beyond his village. The visits that took place later shaped his politics ï the need for emancipation of ôour peopleô. *Ki kore Rajnitite Joriye Porlam* (How I came to be entangled in politics: Trans mine), op cit.

rehabilitation of Bengalee-Hindus and urged for their repatriation. There was wide-spread fear among Tripuri ethno-nationalists that such an exodus could reduce the Tripuris to microscopic, politically insignificant minority in their own land.[7] They failed to define their position on the merger question as well.

However, the Bengalee-Muslims who constituted the second largest population of Tripura till the partition, demanded merger of Tripura with Pakistan. The Bengalee-Hindus, a community which outnumbered the other two ethnic groups, demanded merger with Indian Union. The years that preceded the merger were particularly violent: brutal expulsion of Bengalee-Muslim population and suppression of armed movements by Tripuri organisation which merged with the communist party later.

The politics of this period is significant for two things. One the one hand, the disjunction of earlier discourses of space, people and state brought into play new competing discourses of space, place and people. These discourses were negotiations of the meaning and identity or definition of Tripura as a place, as a home ï to decide who has the right to inhabit it? Who should be excluded? A common practice has been to analyse these events in terms of which group was/is wrong, who was/is right.[8] In this study I tried to understand, instead, how these competing groups, based on ethnicity, invoked spatiality. How do they lay claim a particular territory as a home? How does it become possible for groups belonging to Bengalee-Muslim identity to imagine and narrate Tripura as a place within the larger idea of Muslim spatiality? Or for that matter, how do various groups belonging to Bengalee-Hindu identity

[7] The idea that Tripuri or indigenous people of the Tripura have become ómicroscopic minorityô in their own land forms the central theme of almost every Tripuri ethno-nationalist organizations.
[8] For example Jagadish Gan Choudhuri categorised the Bengalee-Muslims as imperialist and invaders and castigates the Tripuris for targeting Bengali-Hindus, see *A Constitutional History of Tripura*, pp. 125-126, 311, and 368.

imagined Tripura as a place within the idea of Bengal and the Indic sacred cosmological space?

On the other hand, these new competing discourses of Tripura radically transform the idea of Tripura by retrofitting their identity, nationality and home to immemorial past. The search for proofs, either for or against a particular idea of home, in the folksy past generated controversial articulation and circulation of past. In the postcolonial period two competing spatial imagination of Tripura shaped its modern politics: the state-sanctioned idea of Tripura and the Tripuri ethno-nationalist idea of Tripura. These two spatial imaginations present us with two divergent discourses of Tripuraôs history and geography.

While the former imagines Tripura as a home of Bengalee-Hindus since antiquity, the later deny the Bengalee-Hindu character of Tripura. For example, this is reflected in the politics of memory-making or the symbolic politics of Tripura. The monuments and memorials built by the state to commemorate heroes become visual affronts to Tripuri ethno-nationalists. Within Tripuri spatial imagination of Tripura, these monuments and memorials champion another narrative, another past, and therefore contradict, marginalise and erase the geographies of Tripuri identity. Tripuri identity politics draw upon a different conception of Tripuraôs history and geography. Their version of history and geography becomes sources of rival discourses and ideologies ï a source of different narrative of home. This shows the paradoxical capacity of history and geography or the ambivalence of a mapped place. They can function variously, for or against any particular discourse of homeland.

I began this thesis with a set of questions about homeland, identity and specifically their relationship to space. From these questions, I set out to construct a story or stories of how groups actually produce a place as homeland. Evidently, I did not proceed from explicitly stated hypothesis of the relationship between space and identity. In as much as the study is a search for a particular relationship between identity and space/place, the study attempted to locate a spatial history of a place. In that sense it is a historical study: it tries to construct a story and narration of a place. This study insists that methodologies are intrinsic to the kind of research one envisages.

In trying to construct a history of a place, my over-arching intention has been to insert in the scholarship on northeast India a new way of conceptualising place and see what difference does it make to oneôs understanding of identity politics or the articulation of political identity. I tried to demonstrate that identity becomes political only through disjunctions in space. The identification of a geography as homeland is possible only in that disjuncted space. That identification is inscribed, constructed, ambivalent and contested. There is always other rival geographical imaginings of place ï always confronting, subverting and thwarting the dominant narration of place.

The representation of Tripura as a place within Indian nation-state is inconceivable without the image of the map of this place within the map of Indian nation. This representation is possible only when our historical lens is fixed on the dynastic history. But this single way of representing Tripura is misleading. An unconventional look at its spatial history uncovers other ways of looking at Tripura ï there has never been only one Tripura. It was a moving place, multiple Tripuras within the Manikyan

space, and as many as two Tripuras within the British-India imperial space. Though it can be said that all these spaces were politically connected to state-core, cultural affinities were absent. These multiple spatialities and histories are the ideological sites of competing interpretations of modern, one Tripura, a mapped place.

Limitations of the study

A place as home is not given. The connection between place and identity is discursively produced. As such both identity and place do not inhabit a continuous space. They are produced through disjunctions in space. But space is not the only instrument through which identity is constructed. There are other components of identity construction. At any given situation, identity groups will make use of various factors such as culture, economic deprivation and political oppression (real or imagined). Non-emphasis of these factors in this study of identity politics is probably a weakness. But this is intentional or a conscious decision on two grounds. First, as I have reiterated throughout the study, this is an attempt to insert in the scholarship on Tripura in particular and northeast India in general, a new way of conceptualising place and identity. I am interested in how identity groups invoked spatiality in the identification of homeland or nationhood or ethnicity.

Second, a large body of literature already exist which takes into account these factors in the analysis of identity politics in the region. I have pointed out in the introduction chapter the problem with literatures on state-making. These literatures make use of cultural difference, economic backwardness and political assertion as if identity is a given territoriality. The method is to assume that cultural difference or economic

backwardness or political alienation is responsible for identity politics, expressed in demands for state-hood or armed movements for independence. These studies fail to question the ways in which a place or territory becomes a homeland on which state, independent or otherwise, can be organised. A marked out place or territory has to be invested and inscribed with meaning of ôhomeô. Geography and history are powerful technologies of production of ôhomeô. Therefore, it calls for investigation of how actually rival histories and geographies are produced by identity groups because they contradict other ideas of ôhomeô which may be idea of ôIndiaô or at a smaller scale óAssamô.

There are other limitations which are of more serious in nature. These limitations are methodological or more precisely, limitations arising out of paucity of data. First, my reconstruction of precolonial space of Tripura is based on limited texts. I have based chapter II mainly on the chronicle of Manikya dynasty known as óRajmalaô and Tripura Buranji (a description of Tripura by ambassadors of Ahom ruler) translated into Bengalee as ôTripur Desher Kathaô. Both the texts are translated versions. I have not read the originals. I tried to supplement these texts with early colonial descriptions of the region. Moreover, I have gained and used enormously from James C Scottôs analysis of upland space in South East Asia (*The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland South East Asia*).

Second, I have not been able to complement my analysis of precolonial space of Tripura with indigenous maps. In order to point out the clash between indigenous conception of Tripura and colonial conception of space (a subject of chapter III) an indigenous map would have been interesting and useful. The existence of such a map

or maps is doubtful because my tedious searches among published woks or in archives were fruitless. This absence inevitably limits or reduces the significance of an important part of my thesis.

Third, while I rely on written text as my primary data, I relied on other kinds of texts for my analysis of rival geography in chapter V. These texts are symbolic landscape (monuments, statues, memorial sites etcé), orality and conversations/interview (especially with Tripuri ethno-nationalists). These texts were required to augment the paucity of written texts by Tripuri ethno-nationalists.

These limitations, in no way, undermine the central argument of the thesis that a place as a homeland is not a given territoriality. Identity groups lay claim over a particular territory as óhomelandô by using history and geography. óHomelandô then is a spatial ideology par excellence. It is an imagined space or to use Edward Saidôs term an óimaginative geographyô. Like other political battles, politics of homeland is not constituted on the surface of geography but produced through the fabrication of that geography. To ignore its spatiality is an unquestioned epistemology.

Identity groups make a place óhomelandô through discourse of space. Such as invention of sacred sites, toponymies, symbolic landscapes and ruins. These spaces lend a particular identity and character to a place. They champion a particular narrative of a place. But they are always ambivalent. This is because, no matter how much effort identity groups invest in creating the antiquity of a place or of an identity, they are always in the process of making, ongoing projects. Space is always open, porous and fluid as Doreen Massey constantly reminds us. But that space is

meaningless to identity politics. It makes more sense to view identity as produced through disjunctions in space. It always requires a closure, exclusion, inclusion, outsider and insider. It requires a disjunction of open, porous and fluid space or an attempt of it.

The significance of this study lies in its insistence that identity politics, especially ethnic identity, is a spatial ideology. This study recognises, in the tradition of ôspatial turnô in social sciences, the impossibility of political events outside space. Any attempt to understand and carry out a critique of identity politics must inevitably recognise its inherent spatiality, alongside temporality. What this study attempts is to locate identity politics, beyond the conventional framework of culture, in the ways groups imagines their geography. As such instead of trying to search for the evidence of identity in folksy past, it makes more sense to see view identity within series of disjunctions in space.

Tripura today is a contested homeland between two major identity groups: the Bengalee-Hindu and Tripuri. These two narratives of ôhomelandô present us with two divergent discourses of Tripuraôs modernity. In fact they are debate about the very idea of Tripura: its past, present and future. Within that debate politics of identity masquerades in various guises ï in re-naming of place, invention of sacred sites, and commemoration of heroes. Conventional scholarship on the region, specifically the scholarship on identity politics, is steeped in search for authentic or original territories of ethnic groups. Instead of trying to determine original territorial rights, it would be more useful to concentrate on the production of rival histories and geographies by modern identity groups. The re-invention of Nagalim, Tai-Ahom, Twipra, Bodoland

etcé should not be merely seen as etymological. They fabricate geographies, and are attempts to re-conceptualise space. It would be interesting to focus on the imaginative geographies of these new ideas and identities of place.

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APPENDIX 1

SPEECH OF MR. BIJOY KUMAR HRANGKHAWL, MLA , AT THE 20TH MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP OF INDIGENOUS POPULATION (WGIP) 2002 HELD AT GENEVA JULY 22-26, 2002 .

Mr. Bijoy Kumar Hrangkhawl, MLA , Tripura

TRIPURA, a tiny state of federal India was perhaps oldest kingdom in World history , ruled by Tripuri nation . In the Sabha Parva , Chapter XXXI ,the sixtieth verse of the Mahabharata ,the great epics of the Aryan it has stated that ,Sahadeva ,the youngest brother of the Pandavas Conquered the immeasurably effulgent Tripura . In verse 9 to 11 Chapter CCL-III (253) of vana Parva of the Mahabharata it has been stated that ,Kama , a bosom friend of Duryudhan conquered and subjugated kingdom like Mohana , Pattana, Tripura and Kolsala .In the Visma Parva , at Chapter LXX--IV (74) the 8th and the 9th verses says that ,the General of the Tripura emperor joined the over biggest warfare of Kurushetra in support of the Kurus .

Considering all above mention aspect Mr. E.F Sandys , ICS and writer of the HISTORY OF TRIPURA maintained that 'whether the great war of the Mahabharata tool place or a merely Lunar myth ,yet in kingdom of Tripura is exist before vyasa , who complied the great epics. That is before 600 B.C. otherwise he would not have mentioned it has list of Kings '.

In the Ashoka Pillar , now preserved at the Allahabad cantonment , at the instant Emperor Akbar ,we find clear mention of Tripura along with Samatat (now Bengal) , Nepalok (one Nepal) and Kamaruya (now Assam) . The full verses of the inscriptions are as below--' whose emperors commands were fully gratified by the payment of taxes and execution of his (Ashoka) orders by the frontier kings are the Nepalok , Kamaruya , Samatat and Tripura and tribes namely Mahavasa , Yadheyas , Ahias and Kakas (now Kuki) .

According to Rev. James Long , historian critic member of the Asiatic Society mentioned in his ANALYASIS OF THE RAJMALA OR CHONICLES OF TRIPURA , that --' A country little known to Europeans , Tripura ,the highlands ,the last country that yielded to the tide of Moslem invasion , and which it its mountain fastnesses retained for so long a period the tradition unmixed with views that might stream in from others countries .The people of Tripura , i. e. Tripuri like the Sikhs were a military race , and their soldiers often played the same part as the Praetorian guards did in Rome .

The well known Chinese tourist Hue Tsang who traveled India from north to south and east to west also observed that the Brahmaputra valley was under the rule of the GREAT BOROS (BOROKS) in the first part of the 7th century who have rich cultural heritage.

The size of the Tripura kingdom stated to reduce from the 14th century and present area of Tripura state was determined by way of Mughul aggression in 1929. During British rule the question of independent Tripura raised several times before the rulers .The Commissioner of Chittagong wanted to annex Tripura

state forcefully in 1861 . But the Governor General instructed him to refrain from such action saying that the Raja has a large independent Territory since time immemorial in a succession case the privy council also admitted the Raja has Independent state beside Zamindari and in his kingdom his word in law .Tripura was an independent state till 14th October , 1949 and joined the Indian dominion , the next under treaty of INSTRUCMENT OF ACCESSION designed between Lord Mountbaten ,the Governor General of India and Maharani Kanchanprabha, Regent of Tripura on 13.08.1947. According to the Pact, Defense, External Affairs , Communication and Ancillary were supposed to remain with the Federal government while remaining subjects shall be exercised by the state government . But the Bengal employees and the intelligentsia started giving pursue to Maharani Kanchanprabha for Merger agreement was signed on 09.09.1949 and came into being from the 15th October, 1949.

As soon the merger Agreement same in force, influx of refugees from the than East Pakistan was started. In a democratic country population of particular caste, creed and religion in a big factor. In fact, democracy means rule of majority people .Tripura was an oldest kingdom in India, perhaps in the world having chronicles of 184 kings without break . The Tripuri people has such a glorious history, second to one .The oldest ruling dynasty of India as believed by the historians is the Rajput . History says the Rajputs are descendent of Emperor Samudra Gupta who ruled India during 3rd century .But Tripura kingdom existed 600 B.C. as has been revealed by Mr. E.F. Sandy's .

How the refugees overpowered the indigenous peoples of Tripura is best example. In 1901acording to census report total population of Independent Tripura was 173,325 out of it caste / community / religion wise population was as below:

1. Tripura people -- 75,781

2. Other Indigenous People -- 16,696

3. Bengali Hindu --15,072

4. Muslims -- 44,426

5. Manipuri and Manipuri Muslims -- 13,256

6. Others -- 3,000

It is notable that, at that time the Bengali Hindu used to represent less than one percent. After partition of India all the Muslims were compelled to leave Tripura and Bengali Hindus are ruling with absolute majority .The population of Tripura during the last century are as below :

Year	Total population	Indigenous population	Other population
1901	173,325	92,477	80,848
1951	645,707	237,953	407,754
1961	1,142,005	360,070	781,935
1971	1,556,342	450,544	1,105,798
1981	2,053,058	583,920	1,469,138
1991	2,757,205	853,345	1,900,560
2001	3,197,000	N.A.	N.A.

In is clear that violating all norms including the UN Chapter on human rights and fundamental rights of the Indian constitution foreigners ruling our dear mother land we the indigenous people are deprived of fundamental rights like right to self determination . The Tripuri People of Tripura ,the sons of the soils are , real sense refugees in their own country . This is a tragic feature of Tripura, the role and surviving ruling dynasty of India. Here I like to give an account of the refugees influx in Tripura , soon after merger ,as per government record.

Year	Numbers if infiltrators
1950.	67,151
1951.	2,016
1952.	80,000
1953.	32,000
1954.	4,700
1955.	37,500
1956.	50,700
1957.	3,600

Thus within a span of 7 years the sons of the soil were outnumbered by the outsiders and the government machinery was captured by the refugees.

This is reason behind extremism in Tripura .The first extremist organization ,the 'Sengkrak' was formed by the Royal family members in 1945,with a view to resist probable Bengali infiltration in Tripura ,after achieving Independence of India .It did not worked because of isolation of the royal family members from the Tripuri community who live in villages and hills .

The second venture was initiated in 1948, led by Dasharath Deb Barma forming Mukti Parishad , meaning Liberation Council .The idea behind the organization was to drive away the Bengali Refugees with the Communist Party of India 1950 .

In 1968,the third venture under the name of Sengkrak was organized by one Anat Reang with a target to drive away Bengali Refugees from particular valley .The organization was confined within a group of Tripuri People .Ultimately the outfits were compelled to surrender .

The forth initiative was ventured by Binand Jamatia under the nomenclature of All Tripura People's Liberation Organization (ATPLO) .In 1980, the first communal riot took place in Tripura . Thousand of Tripuri People have killed by the Bengali Refugees .Nearly three lakhs indigenous people were compelled to take shelter in the Camps . But Jamatia could not continue the fight and had to Surrender .

You will be astonished to know that , it was me to form Tripura National Volunteer

(TNV) an arm outfits in 1978 with a view to fight for the Tripuri Nation, sons of the soil of Tripura .My achievement was tremendous. The Government of India agreed to increase seats for indigenous people in the state . Legislative Assembly of Tripura by way of Constitution amendment

. I agreed to sign a Memorandum of understanding with the Government of India and returned home along with five hundred Volunteers on 12th August 1988 .The Government of India increased reserved seats of the Tripura Legislative Assembly of which is I am representing now. But the other aspect , related to development of indigenous people has remained neglected .The younger generation could not compromise with the increasing incidents of negligence and treachery upon the Tripuri people , the indigenous people of Tripura .Thus the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) ,the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) came forward to fill up the gaps demanding fundamental , constitutional and human rights of the Tripuri people of Tripura .Their demand is right to self determination which is a born right of everymen and women . They are not secessionist at all as Tripura was never an integral part of India from time immemorial to till India achieved Independence.

The great pain that the suffering of the Tripuri people of Tripura is unexplainable. It is a matter of feeing. A nation starting from the age of Mahabharata survived till the British rule , honorary ,our is the only nation to have a list of 184 kings. The partition of India and Merger of Tripura with India caused great miseries to Tripuri Nation. So, it requires discussion in the international Forum to formulate minimum human rights for the Tripuri Nation for survival .I am grateful to the organizers of the WGIP for giving me scope to tell you about a diminishing nation ,who ruled a big part of India Subcontinent from time immemorial

With regard

Yours

B .K. Hrangkhawl .

Appendix II

Rung (Part 1) by Nanda K Debbarma (Hachuk Khorang, Agartala, 2001)

Raima Sorma twima tangwi twi tola-o kwlwgwi thangka. Aborok twima simi tongmaya. Tongmani chini sirisitini kerang kothoma, tai tongmani hukumu bai gwdaljak botog togsa. Sorma twima tokhlai mani abo chini luku bosong tokhlai tongmani nukthai. O twima ni mwkthango chwng chini Dongoima-Dongoipha ni simi tabuk jora thangwi tongmani luazima nugo. Boni rukungo hathai-hapung aro bisi khoncharjak hug tai haping, mai-khului, haba tai hugbar thepajak. Tai aboni logi logi tongo jaduni dangdo, chongpereng, sumui, goria tai hojagiri. Tabuk jora aborokno nuglia. Phia chini thani abo belai nakhraiwi bwta hi.

Appendix III

Dungur Siring Soroh by Bikash Rai Debbarma (*Chongpreng Yakhrai Bou-Wi*, Kokborok Hukumu Mission: Agartala)

Dungur Siring Soroh
Raima-Saima Komok
Lama-o Tisakha Ari

Sacho-oi Bebak Haloq
Raima! Nwng Tini
Bumung Filwi ógomotiô
Biang Kwmakha
Bolong-Sajwk Koromoti
Bwkha Nini Twma Aswk Kolok

Holong Rwgwi Nini Gana Gini
Sapung Hopung Aiwi
Thaicha Thaicha Khe kwlang Mani
Hani-Yapai Sai-wi
Twi Lik-Lik Kobol Rw-rwk
Kothoma Kwcham Tini Kwma Rw-rwk
Holong Mwkhang Tini Lachi Jagwi
Bolongo Mwkhang Hui-o

Appendix IV

Chronology of the evolution of óTripuraô

1225-1250 - Chengthum Fa defeated ruler of Gaud and annexed Meherkul, a region now in Bangladesh. He probably established the capital at Rangamati (Udaipur) which was believed to be the capital of Mogs. The Mogs are of Arakanese origin and follow Buddhism. They still inhabit predominantly the Udaipur region. The Fa dynasty disintegrated during the reign of his son Dangar Fa.

1325-1350 - Ratna Fa, son of Dangar Fa, re-established the state at Udaipur with the help of ruler of Gaud (Bengal) and became a tributary to it. He also settled Bengalee-Hindus at Rangamati and other regions of his new state. He took upon the title Manikya, instead of Fa. It is probable that adoption of Brahmanical protocols and Hindu cosmography occurred during his reign.

1431-1462 - This is the period of Dharma Manikyaôs reign. He commissioned the writing of chronicle of Manikya dynasty to the Bengalee Brahmins which came to be known as *Rajmala*.

1761	East India Company acquired possession of Bengal from the Mughals and subsequently defeated the Tripura forces stationed at Chittagong and annexed its former regions as ôBritish Tipperahô. This produced new lines between ôHill Tipperahô and ôPlain Tipperahô or British-Tipperah.
1819-1870	This is the period of survey and mapping of territories. Lt. Fisher drew the first boundary between Tripura and British-India controlled Sylhet region in 1919. In similar fashion Tripuraôs northern, southern and eastern boundaries were marked by English surveyors. These surveys and mapping produced modern Tripuraôs geography.
1947-1949	Dissolution of British-India and subsequently end of Manikya dynasty. The death of Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya in 1947 destabilised the ruling house. Tripura joined the new Indian nation in 1949.

Genealogy of Place and Articulation of Political Identity
A study of the Emergence of Tripura as Homeland

Synopsis

Homeland is not a given territoriality and identities do not inhabit a continuous space that can be called homeland. This is because the connection between identity and a marked place is not natural ï that connection is produced through disjunction in space. This disjunction in space is what this study is about: that is, what difference does it make to think of identity as constituted by disjunction in space? The ways identity groups conceptualise space have enormous consequences for identity politics. It is that space I attempt to critically analyse. This study aspires to tease out a radically different reading of geography of place and its production as a specific space by modern identity politics.

Taking Tripura, a state in the northeast India, as a case, this study traces the tortuous path space has been subjected in its emergence as modern contested place. This study then is about the emergence of Tripura as a specific space, a homeland, in the postcolonial period. It is about the making of rival geographical imaginations of Tripura: how identity groups narrate it as their ôhomelandõ? More specifically, how the space called ôhomelandô is produced?

The problem of this study, then, is the emergence of a place as a specific space, a homeland. How identity groups are able to talk of a place as their homeland? How does it become possible for the ówe-selfô to be fixed within a geographical grid? How does groups inscribed themselves onto the mapped geography? My contention is that

a place as a specific space, a homeland, is produced through discourse ï without examining homeland as a discourse one cannot possibly makes sense of the immense political investments in its imagination. Homeland is not something out there, already identifiable, know-able, and talk-able territoriality. It is produced through discourse and this is a study of the discourse of ŏTripuraô as a homeland by competing identity groups. My position is that the competing, alternative version of Tripura as homeland cannot possibly be understood outside discourse. The method of this study then is discourse analysis. Simply defined, it is a method of analysing oral or written communication or any form of text. The focus of analysis is the œexchange of communicationô between conflicting ideas of social reality. This study understands identity, place and homeland as constructs: they are not given objective realities; rather they are socially produced through discourse.

This study argues that, the emergence of Tripura as a specific space ï a homeland ï is possible only after a series of disjunctions in space. First, the disjunctions of precolonial indigenous space or what I called the Manikyan spatial ideologies. Second, the disjunction of imperial/colonial space. Within the Manikyan spatial ideology, Tipperah as homeland of particular identity group did not constitute a meaningful point of reference. Before Tipperah became an identifiable place with its fortified capital at Rangamati (now Udaipur) ï during the reign of Ratna Fa/Manikya ï it was a moving place, an identifiable political centre, not necessarily an identifiable fixed geography. Tipperah as an identifiable fixed geography, albeit open borders, could emerge only after it removed its geographical impediments to state-making: the control of alluvial plains of Bengal which became its principal extractive space. By strategically locating its capital, the state-core, between the contested extractive space

and the mobile hill space, Tipperahôs political and religious elites sustained a fairly successful state under a stable dynasty.

In the indigenous or Manikyan spatial arrangement, a hill subject was defined by his/her propinquity to the state-core. The hill population adjacent to the fortified state-centre ï relatively immobile, performing various roles for the dynasty ï were categorised as Tipperas. Identity ôTipperaô was unstable, ambiguous and geographically fluid. This is because identity ôTipperaô can be lost by enacting two movements. On the one hand, the open geography allowed movement away from the realm of ôTipperaô into the geographical realm of ôKukiô beyond the control of the state. The realm of the Kuki was the geography of ówild, ferocious savage hill peopleô who neither recognised overlordship of Tipperah ruler nor other premodern states in the region. The precolonial states could claim over this territory without actually subjugating communities inhabiting it. On the other hand, the open geography also allowed movement into the state-core and incorporation into the ideology of the ruling political class. The adoption of surname ôThakurô may be seen as one of the important rites of passage for incorporation or assimilation into the ideology of the state. This change signified distance and difference from the previous identity: the stigmatised hill identity.

When the British moved into the region in the Nineteenth century, they introduced new geographical grids of places and population, which in many ways, disjuncted earlier Manikyan grid of nearness and farness. The map was the most powerful technology of imposition of these new geographical grids. The operation of colonial power required clearly marked or defined borders within which the political power

was vested upon a recognised government. As the British-India begun defining and drawing boundaries it led to intractable conflicts with the Rajah of Tipperah. In fact, the period 1820-1920 can be described as period of õboundary disputeô between British-India and Tipperah. New geographical knowledge produced modern mapped Tripura. But this place was still a space within the British-India colonial geographical imagination. It was not outside the imperial space. After the dissolution of British-India ï and subsequent disintegration of Manikya dynasty ï various groups arose to inscribe new ideas of Tripura onto the mapped place. They produced new ways of seeing õTripuraôï as a homeland space.

There are five chapters in this study.. The first chapter is an introduction to the study. It discusses the theories and concepts used and also the objectives and methodology of the study. More importantly, this chapter formulates a set of questions on identity and place. These questions form the starting point of my investigation into a particular space, homeland. The second chapter provides an overview of premodern indigenous space in the region: the history and geography of the region before colonisation by British-India. This chapter is an attempt to provide a different history and geography of place from the ones constructed by the state and the Tripuri ethno-nationalists. More specifically, in this chapter, I plan to reconstruct precolonial spatial arrangement and carry out a different reading of geography ï a reading which will be used to problematise the prevailing ideas of Tripura.

The third chapter discusses the incursion of British-India into the present day region straddling the borders of three postcolonial states (India, Myanmar and Bangladesh). It analyses the role of colonial explorers in the colonial project of mapping the region

and producing mapped and marked spaces and the subsequent displacement of indigenous spaces. It shows how historically and geographically Tripura has been arbitrarily and artificially created into a well-defined place with its marked boundaries through boundary contestations, and agreements between the colonial power and the rulers of Tripura. The second and third chapter form the basis from which to problematise the two modes of historiography in Tripura.

Chapter four details the emergence of postcolonial nation states and seeks to locate the present day Tripura within the spaces of nation-states. It traces how the new discourse on nationhood and sovereignty displaced the old colonial discourse on space and place and Tripura. The abolition of monarchy and the emergence of new form of political power entailed imposition of new notion of Tripura, the place and the people. This new discourse of history and place was also a discourse of modern Tripuraôs border, particularly the new international border, the definition of which made possible the notion of Tripura as home of ótribal and non-tribalô.

Chapter five discusses the rise of Tripuri ethno-nationalist forces in reaction to the displacement ôTripuriôsô sense of place and indigenousness. This chapter looks into Tripuri ethno-nationalist groupsô attempts to re-define place and reconstruct history of Tripura. This re-definition and reconstruction involves attempts to imagine geography and history of Tripura different from the official version. Central to the ethno-nationalist discourse is the re-definition of the border and thereby construct the ótherô as óoutsiderô, and órefugeeô

I began this thesis with a set of questions about homeland, identity and specifically their relationship to space. From these questions, I set out to construct a story or stories of how groups actually produce a place as homeland. Evidently, I did not proceed from explicitly stated hypothesis of the relationship between space and identity. In as much as the study is a search for a particular relationship between identity and space/place, the study attempted to locate a spatial history of a place. In that sense it is a historical study: it tries to construct a story and narration of a place. This study insists that methodologies are intrinsic to the kind of research one envisages.