

Archives and the Erasure of the idea of ‘home’: Northeast India and its Partition-displaced in Perspective

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Abstract

This study explores how archival practices contributed to the erasure and reconfiguration of the idea of “home” among refugee populations in India’s northeastern region of Assam following the Partition of 1947. While scholarship on Partition often focuses on experiences of displacement and on ideas of home, belonging, and identity, archival records in Assam, following colonial administrative legacies and postcolonial state priorities, present an erased and frequently fragmented narrative of refugee lives. The study examines official documents, rehabilitation files, and resettlement documents using historical methods to highlight the tension between what the archive preserves and what it silences. In Assam, the influx of refugees intersected with broader issues of land, ethnicity, and citizenship, eventually obscuring the emotional and cultural dimensions of home and influencing long-term political debates regarding belonging and identity in the region. Creating a space for the home became part of governance and biopolitics. By analysing government records, this study argues that the archive itself becomes a site of erasure, where the intimate geographies of home are overwritten by administrative rationality. On the other hand, contemporary literature compensates for these erasures and the myriad human meanings and attachments with the idea of home is a crucial construction within these narratives. This is also what the work looks into through some select short stories.

Keywords: assam; biopolitics; belonging; literature; silences