



International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)

A Peer-Reviewed Bi-monthly Bi-lingual Research Journal

ISSN: 2349-6959 (Online), ISSN: 2349-6711 (Print)

Impact Factor: 6.8

Volume-XII, Special Issue, April 2026, Page No. 312-316

Published by Scholar Publications, Sribhumi, Assam, India, 788711

Website: <http://www.ijhsss.com>

DOI: [10.29032/ijhsss.vol.12.issue.specialW.296](https://doi.org/10.29032/ijhsss.vol.12.issue.specialW.296)



Unmapped Grief: Partition, Identity, and the Land as Archive in Rashmi Narzary's An Unfinished Search Debolina Chauly

Research Scholar Department of English, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam, India

Received: 07.04.2026; Accepted: 09.04.2026; Available online: 10.04.2026

©2026 The Author(s). Published by Scholar Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

Abstract

The Novel An Unfinished Search by Rashmi Narzary (2023) Follows the Life of Three Generations of The Hazratkandi Family of The Village That Was Transferred to Pakistan And, Later, To Bangladesh. This Paper Interprets the Novel Under Three Intersecting Factors of The Marginalisation of Assam in The Narration of Partition, The Identity Crisis of The In-Between Territories, And the Ability of Land as A Living Memory of Forgotten History. It Claims That Narzary Frames Northeast India Not as A Fringe Location but As a Center of Trauma of Partition. History That Has Not Been Captured by Human Institutions Has Been Preserved by The Land of Malegarh, With Unnamed Graves and Undefined National Identity. To Illustrate How the Novel Expands Geography of The Partition Literature and Recovers a Silenced Archive, The Paper Relies on Postcolonial Theory, Border Studies, And Ecocritical Frameworks.

Keywords: Partition Literature, Northeast India, Assam, Identity, Border Studies, Postcolonial Memory, Ecocriticism, land as Archive

Introduction: The Archive That Was Never Built:

When historians are discussing the Partition of 1947, there are two geographies that dominate the mind and these are Punjab and Bengal. This is not a mere coincidental prejudice. It indicates a larger trend in South Asian historiography, whereby the locations of colonial rule define the ruptures that ought to be inscribed and the ruptures that ought to be discarded. The northern border of India and the state of Assam in particular was partitioned in its right when the Sylhet district was annexed to East Pakistan by undergoing a referendum that was conducted in July 1947. The Partition Museum records the documentary history of the Partition Museum ("The Partition of Bengal and Assam" 3) state that the Partition cut off Assam as an affluent district and put its natural waterways communication channels at a dependency, isolating it economically and geographically. However, this disjuncture is still mostly lacking in the mainstream narrative of Partition. There is a cost involved, not just academically. It is a cost to the communities like Hazratkandis in the novel of Narzary, who only exist where the vacuum is to be bridged between the options of national memory.

In the book *An Unfinished Search* (2023), published by Pippa Rann Books, Rashmi Narzary breaks into such silence. The novel talks of a family that was established in the village of Malegarh, a boundary village in Assam-Bangladesh that has fallen between India, Pakistan

Unmapped Grief: Partition, Identity, and the Land as Archive in Rashmi Narzary's An... Debolina Chaulay and Bangladesh in the same lifetime. Anjaan Hazratkandi, in his turn, does not have any surname. His name has been usurped by a village whose national identity had never been established. Govind Bhattacharjee believes ("An Unfinished Search" 2) that the novel goes to the topics of rejection and non-belonging that war and partition bring with them with a fresh, touching look at the issue. In this paper, it will be mentioned that the text by Narzary can be considered three crucial interventions. It decentralizes the geography of Partition; investigates the psychic unreliability of the identity in a borderland; and offers even the very land as an archive that persists even when human institutions have broken down.

Northeast India as A Neglected Zone of Partition Trauma:

A traditionally indocentric bias has given partition scholarship an indocentric bias, as it has long been understood by academia. According to an argument by a senior researcher published in "Partition 1947" (7), during the initial years of the Partition studies, attention was still centered on Punjab, and no concerns were raised in Bengal. By the time Bengal came to be included, the prevailing narrative was biased towards West Bengal, giving East Bengal a greater marginal status. In this sense, northeast India was virtually nonexistent. But the statistics speak otherwise. Assam was bordered more than 885 kilometres with East Pakistan. In East Pakistan, the percent of the population that was of Hindu descent had dropped to 22 per cent by 1951, the year following 31 per cent of the thematic population in 1947, triggering one of the most continuous migrant outflows in the history of the region ("Partition's Long Shadow" 5). These figures never became part of the popular consciousness of Partition, in the same manner that the carnage at Wagah did.

In the Name of the Nation, Sanjib Baruah posits that the exchange of population on the east was open-ended, unlike in Punjab, where it was also violent, but temporary. The bordered experience of communities that lived on the border of Assam did not alter with the insertion of a border. According to Baruah (4), calling the border international and applying the qualifier illegal to one group of immigrants did not stop the influx of people. This is not a theoretical finding to the fictional family of Narzary. They were not Pakistani and Bangladeshi by choice when their village was concerned. It was repatriated, as in a land claim, to countries that specifically displayed no special interest in the inhabitants of that land. The crisis of identity falling in the family itself is a direct result of the administrative history of the region

"Calling the border international and applying the qualifier illegal to one group of immigrants did not stop the influx of people" (Baruah 4).

The work of Narzary is a literary recuperation of the past. The goal of the unnamed graves at the Malegarh War Memorial that inspired the novel was soldiers of the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny which are absent in British Army papers (Narzary 6). The fact that there are no official records of their names reflects the fact that the memory of the Partition of Assam is not a part of the national memory. In this regard, the novel itself turns into a counter-archiving. As a review of the counter-mapping practices and archival practices, Asoni (8) points out that documenting is a critical practice open to various players, including literary players. Narzary transcribes Hazratkandis in a book that did not make the state list.

The Crisis of Identity and Belonging in The Borderland:

Identities as applied to the borderlands populations do not apply as a philosophical abstraction. It is a bureaucratic state of affairs. It is not an internal crisis that causes the Hazratkandis to lose a sense of self. They lose it due to the reclassification of the ground they

Unmapped Grief: Partition, Identity, and the Land as Archive in Rashmi Narzary's An... Debolina Chaulay are on. Hazratkandi village, where Anjaan takes his last name, is incorporated into Pakistan, which is a part of Bangladesh. Even Antje Anjaan is on the Indian side, yet his name, his grave, his origins are all of a geography which now is foreign soil. As it is shown in the novel, the end of self-discovery of the family is essentially a quest of solid artistic ground. It is not possible when the ground is politically unstable, to fix identity.

This is not an anomaly in the fiction of Narzary. It is a composition in the life of the borderland in Assam. According to a study on Northeast Indian English literature that was released in the "Migration and Trauma in Northeast Indian English Literature" (9), the idea of partition, ethnic uprisings, ecological disaster, and economic changes all have triggered the large-scale migration and displacements in Northeast India. The English-language literature produced in the area attests not only to geographical, but also to psychic itineraries by which people of broken identities bargain. Memory has the functions of wound and bridge. To the Hazratkandis, the unnamed soldier at Malegarh is all that can be passed on. It is a nameless memory, and this is exactly the state of family minus a stable surname.

Iain Chambers, as cited in Choudhury (3), states that migrancy demands a habit of abode in language, in histories, in identities constantly at risk of mutation. Home is a temporary place. Narzary is the theorist who drives this theoretical instability into narrative. The Hazratkandis are not merely practiced in displacement. They inherit it. The search is the main duty of every generation, and the goal of the search is more distant every time. It is not a narrative structure that refers to this intergenerational structure. It is an argument of how Partition is still being lived, in those communities that we still make the official discourse to have already put the files on hold.

The lack of institutional recognition is adding to this crisis. The British Army papers did not give the soldiers at Malegarh. The village has not been considered in the Partition plan as a location to be provided protection. The individuals that were in the border line of the referendum were not consulted as to what country they would like to be part of. According to "Partition's Long Shadow" (5), the Sylhet referendum was carried out in July 1947, although locally people objected to it citing flooding reasons that could not allow voters to access polling stations. The British Referendum Commissioner ruled out these concerns because of schedule. Such laxity of administration regarding the physical and social conditions of borderland peoples is exactly what Narzary reveals as a failure in the institution. Her fiction makes the state responsible for what it never wanted to acknowledge.

Ecologies Of Memory: The Land as A Silent Archive:

The third and the most innovative argument that the Narzary novel develops is an ecological one rather than historical. The land in *An Unfinished Search* is not just mere scenery. It is a witness. The bodies of the soldiers whose names did not arise anywhere are kept in their graves at Malegarh. These barbed wire fences, to which the BSF and the Bangladeshi border guards agreed to bend in order to keep the war memorial on a no man land, is also a negotiated landscape (Narzary 6). The earth is the keeper of what had been forgotten in the archive. This is the idea behind what the ecocritical scholars refer to as the land as an archive.

As Narzary herself observes, "the land at Malegarh holds what no official document dares record – the names, the faces, the belonging of those who were never asked which country they wished to die in" (Narzary 6). The postcolonial ecocritical practice is defined in "Ecocriticism and Postcolonialism" (1) as the one that gathers a new language through the weaving of a new language by the natural environment into making the invisible visible.

According to the scholar Nicole Waller as mentioned in this piece, postcolonialism is interested in displacement, migration and diaspora whereas ecocriticism is obsessed with the connection to land. The novel by Narzary is at the exact crossroads. Displacement is not reflected only in the land. It absorbs it. The Brahmaputra, the Brahmaputra, all its tributaries, the paddy fields, the grave mounds of Malegarh: all these are archives. The evidence of the lives that the national institutions did not want to document is in them. According to DeLoughrey and Handley (2), within the framework of postcolonial ecologies, literature of environment turns into a platform where authors find their place and debate the issue of the connection between ecology destruction and cultural exclusion. In the case of Narzary, the ecological site is not destroyed in a traditional manner. It is simply unmarked. The land has memory without accreditation of the headstones, the official records or even the national curricula.

This literary analysis can be applied to real world implications. Anzaldua, as cited in "Borderlands" (4), considers the borderland to be a place where the bios of two worlds interact to create a third nation, a border culture. This third place is not an Indian or a Pakistani or a Bangladeshi. It is Hazratkandi. It is a culture that is informed by the experience of being sold across countries against one's wish. The physical realization of this third space is the South Park of Malegarh and the literary one is the novel. Narzary is not idealistic about this state. The graves have no names. The searching is incomplete. But the soil still exists, and it has a memory of what the states have long ago forgotten.

The ecocritical aspect of the novel is also an attack on a certain appropriation of human agency in recovering the memory in postcolonial studies. Archival research is land-based and political in the sense that it involves indigenous archival methodology, as stated by Cruz and Kandagawa (7). To ethically practice the land as an archive it is important to realise that the land is not a passive repository. It actively takes part in the politics of memory. The graves of Malegarh are not merely graves where the soldiers had been interred. They are the sole surviving remnant of the fact that the soldiers existed. That the BSF and the Bangladeshi border guards bending the fence to save the memorial is to the whole reading, an ecological act rather than a diplomatic act. It is an admission that the land is something that cannot be reproduced in any official document.

Conclusion: Towards A Decentred Geography of Partition:

An Unfinished Search does not challenge its readers to replace Assam by Punjab, and Bangladesh by West Bengal. And it demands something greater. It demands a geography of Partition to be perceived as multifarious, coherent and disproportionate. The search of Hazratkandi family cannot find a parallel to Punjab refugees. It is another type of loss, which is determined by various administrative choices, various ecological circumstances, and various failures of archives. This is exactly what Narzary brings to the Partition literary heritage: she demonstrates that the map of trauma is greater than the one that has been passed down.

The three points that have been presented in this paper are related to one another. The marginalisation of Assam in Partition discourse is not just an academic oversight. The same administrative logic that rejected the flooding in the Sylhet referendum and unnamed soldiers' graves are effects of the same administrative logic. It is not the identity crisis on the part of the Hazratkandis that is the cause of failure. It is an organizational implication of being placed in geographies that had been structured by other people. The fact that the land

Unmapped Grief: Partition, Identity, and the Land as Archive in Rashmi Narzary's An... Debolina Chaulay can store memory is not figurative. It is a material fact, which the novel of Narzary recovers with certainty and sorrow. According to Choudhury (3), when the time to do this came and people needed to decide which country to stay in, and which one to leave, destroyed homes and lives were being changed permanently. The narzary novel also states that even when there was no one in the institutions who cared to ask, the evidence of those lives still remained with the home itself, the land.

The novel is a significant twist to postcolonial literature scholars. It indicates that the archive of Partition is not sealed off. It spreads through sceneries, household names, unidentified graves and military boundaries. It is possessed in the hands of old men who dig graves whose occupants bear the features of their grandfather. To restore this archive, it is essential to read literature as a cultural production, as historical testament, and ecological record. *An Unfinished Search* by Narzary insists on this demand rather quietly and rather strongly.

References:

1. Asoni, Alessandro. Migration, the archive, and the map. *Geography Compass* (2025).
2. Baruah, Sanjib. In the Name of the Nation: India and Its Northeast. Stanford University Press / De Gruyter, 2020.
3. Borderlands. Centre for Border Studies, n.d.
4. Choudhury, Sarmila. Memory, partition, and identity in northeast India. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 14.2 (2022).
5. Cruz, Luis H., and Emi Kandagawa. Archive as land: Toward a land-based archival methodology. *International Politics* (2023).
6. DeLoughrey, Elizabeth, and George Handley. Introduction: Towards an aesthetics of the earth. *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*, Oxford University Press, 2011.
7. Huggan, Graham, and Helen Tiffin. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*. Routledge, 2015.
8. Migration and trauma in northeast Indian English literature. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts* (2025).
9. Partition's long shadow: Post-partition migration and the citizenship conundrum in postcolonial Assam. *Journal of Migration Affairs*, n.d.
10. Narzary, Rwngrwa. *An Unfinished Search: One Lineage, in One Village, Through Three Nations*. Pippa Rann Books and Media, 2023.
11. The Partition of Bengal and Assam. Partition Museum, 2023.
12. *An Unfinished Search*. Pippa Rann Books, 2023.
13. Ecocriticism and postcolonialism: When land remember. poco.lit., 2020.
14. Rai, Rajesh. From colonial 'Mongoloid' to neoliberal 'Northeastern': Theorising race, racialization and racism in contemporary India. *Asian Ethnicity* 23.3 (2022): 442-462.
15. Themed issue on literature of northeast India. *Rupkatha Journal* 14.2 (2022).
16. Partition 1947: Lessons we need to un/learn. *The Daily Star*, 2022.