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Spatial Violence, Displacement, and Cultural Memory in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Independence*

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Abstract- ***The Partition of British India in 1947 was not only a territorial reconfiguration that created two sovereign states but also a radical reorganization of everyday spaces, relations, identities, and affective attachments. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Independence (2023) reflects on the Bengal Partition through the overlapping lives of three sisters—Priya, Deepa, and Jamini—whose lives reveal the personal impacts of political boundary-making. Previous academic work on the novel has addressed women's suffering, feminist historiography, trauma, nationalism, postmemory, and sisterhood. This article offers an alternative critical intervention by reading independence through the interlinked notions of spatial violence, bordering, displacement, and belonging. The article, drawing on recent studies on the Partition, spatial humanities, migration studies, and literary approaches to home, argues that Divakaruni represents the Partition as a process of spatial transformation, where familiar domestic, communal, and public spaces become contested territories. The political border thus enters into everyday life, before and beyond its mapping representation. This article develops the idea of "spatiality of unbelonging" to describe the condition where geographical, social, cultural, and affective relationships with home are simultaneously fractured. The three characters represent various modalities of spatial negotiation. Priya's transition from domestic restriction to professional space; Deepa's crossing the communal boundaries in her relationship with Raza; and Jamini's experience of destruction and reconstruction of domestic space. The study further argues that memory, family relations, cultural practices, and professional identity act as counter-spaces in which displaced subjects reconstruct belonging. Independence contributes to the growing field of Bengal Partition Studies and shows the ongoing significance of literary narratives to global partition studies by moving critical focus from partition as territorial division to partition as the transformation of lived space***

Index Terms- ***belonging, Bengal Partition, bordering, cultural memory, displacement, home, Partition Studies, spatial violence***

I. INTRODUCTION

The Partition of British India in 1947 remains one of the defining ruptures of modern South Asian history. The event created new national territories while simultaneously disrupting older relationships between people, places, communities, and memories. Recent studies has increasingly challenged approaches that treat Partition as a single political event occurring at a fixed historical moment. Shoma (2022), for instance, describes Partition as an ongoing process whose effects extend from 1947 into the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. The continuing movement of people, memories, identities, and cultural practices across borders demonstrates that the consequences of Partition cannot be contained within the date of independence.

Bengal occupies a particularly important position within this discussion. Studies has historically given greater visibility to Punjab, whereas Bengal's experience has frequently received comparatively less attention. Sengupta's research emphasizes the relative neglect of Bengal in Partition studies and argues for greater attention to the experiences of ordinary people whose lives were transformed by the drawing of the boundary. Recent studies has reinforced this need by examining Bengali refugees, Dalit displacement, refugee settlements, memory practices, border formation, and literary representations of Bengal. (Sengupta, 2022).The importance of Bengal is also central to Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Independence*. In an interview, Divakaruni explains that she chose Bengal partly because she felt that comparatively little had been written in English about the painful effects of Partition on India's eastern border. The novel consequently participates in a larger effort to recover Bengal from the margins of dominant Partition narratives.

Independence follows three sisters—Priya, Deepa, and Jamini—whose lives are transformed by the violence surrounding Partition. The novel connects national history with intimate experiences of love, family, gender, communal identity, migration, professional aspiration, and survival. Contemporary reviews similarly identify the three sisters as the principal means through which Divakaruni explores the costs of freedom and the contradictions between national independence and individual experience.

The academic criticism already available has pointed to several important directions. Bhardwaj and Kaur (2023) examine the themes of cultural conflict

and immigration in the novel by reading it from a female perspective. Biswas (2024) addresses specifically women's representation in contemporary partition fiction and *Independence*. Verma (2026) has recently published an article in which she builds an explicitly feminist framework through Simone de Beauvoir, Cathy Caruth, Homi K. Bhabha, and Marianne Hirsch, looking at feminist historiography, trauma, nationalism, and postmemory. Another study, in 2026, looks at intergenerational trauma in Independence and Before We Visit the Goddess.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Independence* has been an important contribution to the understanding of women, trauma, and Partition. In this study, I extend this criticism to examine how the Partition alters the spaces through which people experience home and belonging. The study shows that the border is not simply a political line on a map but enters into the everyday spaces of the village, household, marketplace, marriage, body, and memory.

Partition as spatial violence is represented by independence, in which familiar spaces are contested, exclusionary, and unsafe. This transformation produces spatial unbelonging, which is understood as the rupture of geographical, social, cultural, and affective relations with home. Priya's, Deepa's, and Jamini's stories show how gender, religion, family, and displacement influence different forms of belonging and exclusion.

Yet the novel does not present unbelonging as permanent. Memory, professional identity, interpersonal relations, and cultural practices are counter-spaces for the production of new forms of belonging. Priya reconstitutes agency through professional space; Deepa subverts communal boundaries through her cross-religious relationship; and Jamini maintains belonging through family and cultural continuity.

The study therefore proposes the following spatial trajectory: Home provides a sense of identity and security. Bordering creates boundaries that lead to spatial violence and displacement. Displacement produces unbelonging, while memory preserves connections with the past. Through memory and identity reconstruction, individuals achieve re-belonging in a new or transformed sense of home.This framework extends feminist and postcolonial readings of Independence by positioning spatiality as a central category for understanding Partition, gender, displacement, memory, and the continuing negotiation of home and belonging.

II. BENGAL PARTITION AND THE QUESTION OF SPACE

The contemporary study of Bengal Partition has increasingly moved toward questions of space, migration, memory, and everyday experience. Sengupta (2022) demonstrates how Sealdah railway station became a significant refugee settlement space in post-Partition Calcutta. The railway station was not merely a transit point; for many refugees, it became a temporary or extended site of habitation.

Such studies complicates conventional understandings of refugee movement. A refugee is not simply a person who moves from one country to another. Refugeeness can involve prolonged negotiation with spaces that are neither completely home nor completely foreign.

The transformation of space is also central to recent research on Bengal's border history. The study of East Bengal, East Pakistan, and Bangladesh as successive formations demonstrates that borders are historically produced rather than naturally given (Ferdous, 2022). A recent review of Ferdous's Partition as Border Making emphasizes precisely this relationship between Partition and the production of successive border regimes.

The concept of border-making is central to reading Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Independence* because the novel shows that bordering begins before the formal Partition boundary is created. Religious identities gradually reorganize everyday relationships and transform familiar spaces into sites of suspicion, surveillance, and exclusion. Neighbours become representatives of religious communities, marketplaces become spaces of communal tension, marriage becomes a test of religious loyalty, and households become places where belonging is negotiated or denied. Thus, Partition is represented not only as territorial division but also as the everyday reorganization of social relationships and spatial practices.

Such a reading corresponds with recent border studies that conceptualizes bordering as a process rather than simply as a physical or territorial line. Wemyss (2023), for instance, emphasizes the ways in which bordering can become embodied in everyday practices and institutional arrangements rather than remaining confined to formal checkpoints or geographically identifiable boundaries. This process-oriented understanding is particularly relevant to Independence, where communal differentiation gradually becomes embedded in ordinary interactions before it is fully experienced as territorial separation. The significance of this process lies in its ability to transform familiar spaces without necessarily altering their physical coordinates. The village may remain

geographically identifiable as the same village, the marketplace may remain physically accessible, and the household may remain materially intact; yet their social meanings change as religious classification begins to determine who can move freely, whom one can trust, whom one can marry, and who can legitimately claim belonging.

The everyday dimension of bordering is therefore crucial to Divakaruni's representation of Partition. Frontiers in *Independence* are not confined to the formal boundary between India and Pakistan; they are reproduced within the spaces of everyday life. The novel's representation of communal tension demonstrates how political divisions become socially effective when they are internalized through ordinary practices, relationships, and perceptions. Border-making consequently operates at multiple levels: between communities, within families, between intimate partners, and even within individual identities. The movement from familiarity to suspicion, from coexistence to classification, and from shared space to contested space illustrates how the political border acquires meaning through everyday social behaviour. *Independence* thus invites a reading of Partition as a multi-layered process of bordering in which territorial division is preceded and reinforced by social, cultural, and affective forms of boundary-making.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent Partition studies increasingly view 1947 not as a closed historical event but as an ongoing process shaped by memory, migration, art, literature, oral testimony, and cultural practices. In Bengal, Partition continued to influence understandings of home, displacement, identity, and belonging. Clini et al. (2024) show how inherited Partition memories shape diasporic identities and ideas of community, home, and belonging, demonstrating that even memories of experiences not directly lived can influence later generations.

Roy (2024) further highlights the relationship between memory and material space, showing how rivers, borders, food, cultural objects, and shared heritage preserve and reinterpret memories of Bengal Partition. Similarly, Hornabrook et al. (2024) demonstrate how memories of Bengal Partition travel between South Asia and the United Kingdom, showing that displacement does not necessarily sever connections with the homeland. Mukhopadhyay (2025) extends this perspective through digital oral history, emphasising how affective listening, interpersonal relationships, and place help preserve Partition memories.

Taken together, these studies show that Bengal Partition memory operates across generations, spaces, cultural practices, and oral and digital forms of testimony. This perspective is particularly relevant to Divakaruni's *Independence*, which recovers intimate family histories rather than focusing solely on political Partition. The novel shows how memory preserves the emotional and spatial dimensions of lost homes and contributes to re-belonging by maintaining connections with the past, culture, and identity.

Recent refugee and displacement studies increasingly challenge the idea of home as a fixed geographical location, viewing it instead as a dynamic concept shaped by memory, identity, relationships, cultural practices, and emotional attachment. Pearlman (2023) shows that belonging is influenced not only by experiences after displacement but also by individuals' earlier connections with their homeland. Thus, displacement may begin before physical departure, when familiar spaces become unsafe or transformed by communal divisions and exclusion.

Research on transnational families similarly shows that home can survive through family memories, language, food, rituals, and cultural practices despite geographical separation. Kifayatullah and Jalal (2023) demonstrate how home, longing, homemaking, and belonging can be continuously reconstructed in diasporic fiction. Such perspectives move beyond the simple opposition between home and exile, recognising that displaced individuals may experience both loss and attachment.

In Divakaruni's *Independence*, the Ganguly sisters experience home as a space reshaped by political violence, communal division, family separation, and displacement. Yet family, memory, cultural practices, and emotional attachments preserve connections with home. Their experiences illustrate spatial unbelonging, while memory, relationships, mobility, and cultural practices enable them to negotiate new forms of identity and attachment. Thus, Independence presents displacement not only as spatial unbelonging but also as a pathway towards re-belonging.

Recent migration and border studies increasingly examine violence as a process produced through the organisation, regulation, and control of space. Kreichauf (2021), through the concept of legal-spatial violence, demonstrates how legal and institutional practices regulate mobility and create unequal spatial conditions. This perspective shows that space is not politically neutral but can be used to regulate access, movement, belonging, and displacement.

Although Independence focuses on Partition rather than contemporary migration, spatial violence provides a useful framework for understanding how political decisions transform lived environments.

Partition produced displacement, exclusion, property loss, communal segregation, and restrictions on movement. Divakaruni represents familiar homes, villages, marketplaces, roads, and neighbourhoods as spaces that gradually become insecure and exclusionary. Thus, violence transforms not only physical spaces but also their social and emotional meanings. The novel consequently reveals the process bordering → spatial violence → displacement → spatial unbelonging, creating the basis for understanding memory and re-belonging as ways of reconstructing relationships with home.

Critical studies of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Independence* have examined cultural conflict, migration, gender, trauma, nationalism, and postmemory. Bhardwaj and Kaur (2023) highlight cultural conflict, immigration, and women's experiences, while Biswas (2024) situates the novel within gendered representations of Partition. These studies demonstrate how Priya, Deepa, and Jamini experience Partition through domestic, familial, communal, and bodily spaces.

Verma (2026) brings together feminist theory, trauma, nationalism, and postmemory to connect individual experiences with collective histories of Partition. Chelvi (2026) further examines intergenerational trauma and postcolonial displacement, showing how Partition continues through memory, identity, and displacement. Together, these studies establish Independence as an important text for examining the gendered, psychological, and cultural consequences of Partition.

Despite these contributions, limited attention has been given to the spatial processes through which Partition produces violence and unbelonging. The present study therefore places space at the centre of analysis, examining how Partition transforms homes, restricts movement, produces segregation, and disrupts relationships with place. The research gap lies in understanding how Independence spatializes Partition through the destruction, regulation, contestation, and reconstruction of home. By connecting spatial violence and spatial unbelonging with feminist, trauma, postcolonial, and memory perspectives, the study shows how displaced subjects negotiate new forms of belonging through memory, relationships, professional identity, and cultural practices.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework combines Lefebvre's production of space, the concept of bordering, and theories of home and re-belonging to examine Independence as a narrative of spatial transformation. Lefebvre's approach views space as socially produced through political relations, everyday practices, and cultural meanings; accordingly, the Ganguly household, village, marketplace, and professional spaces acquire changing meanings as communal tensions reshape relationships and patterns of belonging. The concept of bordering further demonstrates that boundaries are produced not only through territorial lines but also through religious categorization, social exclusion, marriage, communal suspicion, mobility restrictions, and familial rejection. Deepa's relationship with Raza illustrates how such boundaries can be challenged through alternative relational spaces, demonstrating the process of "bordering before the border." The study further conceptualizes home as a spatial-affective formation sustained through place, memory, relationships, cultural practices, and emotional attachment. Physical displacement may disrupt belonging without completely erasing it, allowing individuals to reconstruct home through memory, professional identity, relationships, and cultural practices. Together, these concepts establish the analytical progression: Production of Space → Bordering → Spatial Violence → Spatial Unbelonging → Re-Belonging, through which Independence is examined as a literary representation of how Partition transforms lived spaces and how individuals negotiate new forms of belonging after spatial rupture.

V. METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative interpretive methodology based on close textual analysis of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Independence, focusing on how Partition transforms inhabited spaces and shapes experiences of belonging and displacement through the trajectories of Priya, Deepa, and Jamini. The analysis is organized around four interconnected categories: physical space, including homes, villages, public places, educational and professional environments; social space, encompassing family, community, religion, marriage, and neighbourhood relationships; affective space, involving fear, attachment, grief, nostalgia, security, and alienation; and counter-space, through which memory, professional identity, interpersonal relationships, cultural practices, and alternative communities enable the reconstruction of belonging. These categories are examined relationally to demonstrate how physical transformation, social exclusion, emotional rupture, and re-belonging intersect within individual experiences of Partition. The textual analysis is situated within studies on Bengal Partition, displacement, refugee studies, spatiality, migration, and cultural memory, connecting the novel's intimate experiences to broader structures of boundary-making and spatial violence. Existing feminist-trauma studies

on Independence is used primarily to establish the research context and gap, while the present study develops a distinct analytical trajectory centred on spatial production, bordering, spatial violence, spatial unbelonging, and re-belonging.

VI. PARTITION AS SPATIAL VIOLENCE

Partition is conventionally represented through cartographic imagery: a line drawn across a map, a territorial boundary separating two political entities, or the division of geographical space into distinct national territories. Such representations, however, can obscure the ways in which territorial division becomes an experience of everyday life. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Independence* shifts attention from the abstract geography of Partition to the lived consequences of boundary-making. The novel demonstrates that the violence of Partition becomes most tangible when the cartographic division enters familiar environments and transforms the relationships through which individuals experience home, community, and security. Partition consequently appears not simply as the creation of a political boundary but as a process through which established social geographies are progressively destabilized.

The village initially represents a relatively continuous social environment in which family, neighbours, religious identities, commerce, domestic relationships, and everyday routines coexist within a recognizable spatial order. The significance of this setting lies in its ordinariness: the village functions as a lived space rather than merely as a geographical location. Its streets, homes, neighbourhoods, and public spaces are embedded within networks of familiarity and social interaction. As communal violence intensifies, however, this established geography begins to change. Religious identity increasingly becomes a determining factor in perceptions of safety and belonging, while relationships that were previously governed by familiarity become influenced by communal suspicion. The transformation is therefore spatial as well as social. The village remains physically identifiable, but its meaning changes as political and communal divisions become embedded within everyday interactions.

The transformation of the village produces corresponding changes in its constituent spaces. The neighbourhood becomes a site of suspicion, as individuals increasingly interpret one another through communal identities rather than through established relationships. The household becomes vulnerable, undermining its conventional function as a protected space of family and continuity. The marketplace becomes a potential space of exclusion, where ordinary economic and social interaction is affected by communal divisions. These transformations demonstrate that the territorial border does not begin its operation only when it is formally institutionalized. Rather, its social logic is gradually reproduced through everyday practices of identification, suspicion, exclusion, and restricted mobility. In this sense, *Independence* represents what may be described as "bordering before the border": the production of social and affective boundaries precedes and prepares the ground for the formal territorial division.

This process constitutes the central meaning of spatial violence in the novel. Spatial violence does not refer exclusively to the destruction of buildings or the physical removal of populations. It also encompasses the transformation of spaces that were previously associated with familiarity and security into environments characterized by fear, uncertainty, exclusion, and vulnerability. A home may remain physically standing while ceasing to function as a secure home; a neighbourhood may remain geographically intact while its inhabitants no longer experience it as a space of trust; and a marketplace may continue to operate while communal identity determines who can participate safely. Spatial violence therefore operates through the reorganization of the meanings, accessibility, and social functions of ordinary places.

Historical studies on Bengal Partition further demonstrates the prolonged spatial consequences of displacement. Sengupta (2022), for example, examines the occupation of Sealdah Station by refugees and shows how displaced populations continued to inhabit unstable and transitional spaces for years after Partition. Such experiences challenge the assumption that displacement can be understood as a single moment in which individuals simply move from one geographical location to another. Instead, displacement may produce prolonged conditions of spatial uncertainty in which refugees negotiate temporary shelters, public spaces, institutional restrictions, and uncertain claims to belonging. Rahaman's (2025) microhistorical study of property in Noakhali similarly draws attention to the relationship between displacement, property loss, and the abandonment of hopes associated with remaining in one's original home. These historical perspectives reinforce the argument that Partition transformed not only territorial boundaries but also the material and emotional relationships individuals maintained with property and place.

Divakaruni translates these larger historical processes into intimate narrative experience by locating the consequences of Partition within the lives of the Ganguly sisters and their surrounding

community. The significance of the novel lies precisely in this movement between the macro-geography of Partition and the micro-geographies of everyday life. Political decisions concerning territory become meaningful through changes in the household, neighbourhood, marketplace, family, and interpersonal relationships. The novel thereby demonstrates that the violence of Partition cannot be adequately understood through maps and borders alone. Its deeper consequences emerge when the political reorganization of territory transforms the spaces in which people have lived, loved, worked, remembered, and imagined their futures.

The spatial transformation represented in Independence can therefore be understood as a progression from continuity to contestation and from familiarity to unbelonging. The village that initially provides a recognizable social geography becomes increasingly fragmented; the household that provides security becomes vulnerable; and everyday spaces become structured by communal differentiation. Partition consequently produces a rupture not only between territories but also between individuals and the spaces that previously sustained their sense of identity. This process establishes the foundation for the subsequent analysis of home and displacement, where spatial violence becomes more directly connected to the loss of security, the disruption of belonging, and the search for alternative spaces through which identity can be reconstructed.

VII. THE UNMAKING OF HOME

In Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Independence*, home initially functions as a protective and cohesive structure through which the Ganguly sisters experience familial continuity, social identity, cultural memory, and emotional security. The Ganguly household is therefore more than a physical residence; it constitutes a relational and affective space in which family histories, everyday practices, and attachments to place are sustained. The significance of this domestic space becomes increasingly visible when communal violence begins to destabilize the social environment surrounding it. As the wider geography of the village is transformed by suspicion, violence, and religious division, the protective function of the household is progressively undermined. The novel consequently establishes a crucial relationship between the security of home and the stability of the social world in which that home is situated.

The unmaking of home, therefore, cannot be reduced to the destruction or loss of property. What is threatened is the wider network of meanings through which a physical location becomes a home. The loss involves security, familiarity, recognition, and continuity simultaneously. Security is undermined when a previously protected domestic environment becomes vulnerable to external violence; familiarity is disrupted when neighbours and surrounding spaces cease to carry their earlier meanings; recognition is weakened when communal identity begins to determine who belongs; and continuity is fractured when displacement interrupts established familial, cultural, and social relationships. Home consequently becomes unstable even before physical departure occurs. This distinction is important to the present study because it demonstrates that spatial violence operates not only through the removal of bodies from territory but also through the transformation of the conditions that make a place inhabitable and meaningful.

The historical experiences of Bengal refugees further support this understanding of home as a multidimensional formation. Sengupta (2022) demonstrates how refugees created temporary forms of habitation within railway spaces, revealing the precarious conditions under which displaced populations attempted to establish shelter and continuity after Partition. Such temporary habitation illustrates the distinction between shelter and home: a physical space may provide immediate protection without necessarily providing the social recognition, familiarity, security, and continuity associated with an established home. Banerjee (2025), meanwhile, demonstrates that Bengali refugees developed political and social communities following displacement, indicating that displaced populations were not simply passive recipients of historical violence but actively constructed new forms of collective life. These developments suggest that displacement involves both the loss of established spatial belonging and the gradual creation of alternative forms of social belonging.

The refugee consequently occupies an ambiguous position between spaces. The former home remains emotionally and culturally significant, even when physical access to it has been disrupted or permanently lost, while the new location may remain socially uncertain and emotionally unfamiliar. The displaced subject therefore exists between a remembered home and an incompletely established present. This condition corresponds directly with the concept of spatial unbelonging proposed in this study. Spatial unbelonging emerges when geographical displacement is accompanied by the disruption of social recognition, cultural continuity, and affective attachment. The refugee is thus not simply someone who has moved from one place to another but someone whose relationship with place has been fractured.

Independence makes this fracture particularly significant by locating the consequences of Partition within intimate family experience. The Ganguly household represents a pre-Partition structure of belonging, but the political and communal transformations surrounding it progressively destabilize the conditions upon which that belonging depends. The resulting loss is consequently both material and symbolic. What is unmade is not merely a house but a spatial system of belonging comprising family, community, memory, identity, and security. At the same time, the historical experience of Bengali refugees demonstrates that the unmaking of home can generate attempts to construct new forms of habitation, community, and identity. This tension between loss and reconstruction becomes central to the novel's representation of displacement.

The unmaking of home therefore constitutes the first major stage in the movement toward spatial unbelonging. Once the protective relationship between individual and place is fractured, displacement becomes more than geographical movement: it becomes a crisis of identity and recognition. Yet Independence does not present this crisis as an endpoint. The disruption of established home creates the conditions under which memory, relationships, professional identity, and cultural practices can function as alternative forms of homemaking. The analysis therefore moves from the unmaking of home to the negotiation of belonging, demonstrating how Divakaruni's characters respond to spatial rupture by developing new ways of inhabiting, remembering, and imagining home.

VIII. PRIYA: FROM DOMESTIC SPACE TO PROFESSIONAL SPACE

Priya's narrative in Independence is frequently approached through a feminist framework, particularly in relation to women's autonomy, patriarchal expectations, and the struggle for self-determination. A spatial reading, however, adds another dimension to this interpretation by examining how gender ideology regulates women's access to particular spaces. Priya's aspiration to become a doctor requires movement beyond the domestic sphere traditionally assigned to women. Her struggle is therefore not simply a struggle for professional identity or individual freedom; it is also a struggle over access to space. The question of where a woman is permitted to exist, study, work, and participate in public life becomes inseparable from the question of what forms of identity society allows her to construct.

The patriarchal spatial arrangement challenged by Priya is encapsulated in the formulation, “Man for the field and woman for the hearth” (Divakaruni, 2023). The distinction establishes a gendered geography in which the public sphere is associated with men while the domestic sphere is designated as women's legitimate location. The field consequently functions as a metaphor for economic, professional, and civic participation, whereas the hearth represents domesticity, family responsibility, and restricted mobility. Priya's refusal to accept this arrangement therefore challenges more than the conventional expectation that women should marry and remain within the household. Her resistance questions the spatial organization of gender itself by challenging the assumption that biological sex should determine the spaces an individual is permitted to occupy.

This challenge becomes explicit in Priya's question: “Is a woman not valuable enough in herself?” (Divakaruni, 2023, p. 87). Although the question can be read primarily as a challenge to patriarchal assumptions about women's value, its implications are also spatial. The question interrogates a social order in which women's value is frequently measured through their relationships to husbands, families, and domestic responsibilities. If a woman's value is recognized independently of these relationships, then her access to education, employment, professional institutions, and public life can no longer be treated as secondary or exceptional. Priya's question consequently opens a conceptual space in which female identity is not confined to a predetermined domestic location.

Education becomes the first significant mechanism through which Priya expands this spatial possibility. Her pursuit of medicine enables movement beyond the boundaries of the household and provides access to institutions and professional environments traditionally associated with male authority. The movement can therefore be conceptualized as domestic enclosure → education → professional mobility → civic participation. Each stage represents an expansion of spatial agency. Education allows Priya to enter new institutional spaces; professional training enables her to occupy a specialized public role; and medical practice ultimately connects her individual aspirations with wider civic participation. Professional identity consequently functions not merely as an occupation but as a counter-space through which Priya challenges the spatial restrictions imposed by patriarchal social structures.

This interpretation complements rather than duplicates Verma's feminist reading of Priya. Verma interprets Priya's medical aspiration through Simone de Beauvoir's distinction between immanence and transcendence, emphasizing the manner in which Priya resists the limitations imposed upon women by patriarchal society. The present study retains the significance of that interpretation but shifts the

analytical question from the philosophical opposition between immanence and transcendence to the spatial possibilities produced by Priya's refusal of domestic confinement. The issue, therefore, is not only whether Priya achieves individual transcendence but also which spaces become accessible to her when she rejects the socially prescribed location of the woman within the household.

The novel's assertion that "The best protection any woman can have is courage" (Divakaruni, 2023, p. 134) acquires additional significance within this spatial framework. Courage functions as a condition of movement because entering spaces from which women have historically been excluded requires resistance to social expectations and institutional barriers. Priya's courage therefore enables her to cross boundaries between domestic and public life, dependence and professional autonomy, and prescribed identity and self-defined identity. The statement can consequently be understood not merely as an affirmation of psychological strength but as an argument for spatial agency: women require the confidence and autonomy to enter, inhabit, and transform spaces traditionally denied to them.

Priya's trajectory thus demonstrates that independence operates simultaneously at political, social, and spatial levels. Her movement beyond the domestic sphere challenges the assumption that women's legitimate place is confined to the household and establishes professional space as a site of self-definition. At the same time, her professional identity demonstrates that re-belonging does not necessarily require a return to a previous spatial order. Instead, new forms of belonging can be created through access to alternative institutions and communities. Priya consequently embodies the article's broader argument that spatial independence involves the capacity to claim, occupy, and transform spaces that have historically been regulated by gendered power.

Her story also expands the article's conceptual movement from spatial unbelonging to re-belonging. The domestic sphere initially represents both security and restriction; professional space subsequently becomes a counter-space in which Priya reconstructs her identity and social position. Her independence is therefore not simply the achievement of personal freedom but the acquisition of the ability to determine where she belongs and what she can do within that space. Through Priya, Independence transforms the feminist question of women's freedom into a spatial question concerning access, mobility, occupation, and agency.

IX. DEEPA: COMMUNAL BORDERING AND SPATIAL TRANSGRESSION

Deepa's narrative provides one of the most explicit representations of communal bordering in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Independence. Her relationship with Raza challenges the assumption that religious identity must determine the boundaries of interpersonal belonging. Although the relationship is initially constituted through individual affection and emotional attachment, the intensification of communal consciousness progressively subjects it to religious categorization. The conflict surrounding Deepa and Raza consequently demonstrates how Partition transforms an intimate relationship into a political and communal question. What appears initially as a personal relationship becomes increasingly interpreted through the binary of Hindu and Muslim, thereby illustrating how broader processes of communal bordering enter the most intimate spaces of everyday life.

The spatial consequences of this bordering become particularly visible when Deepa is expelled from the family home. The existing studies records the communal hostility surrounding her relationship with Raza and the mother's demand that Deepa leave the household. The statement, "Get out! Pack your things and leave. Now, I do not want you under my roof another moment" (Divakaruni, 2023, p. 226, as cited in Bhardwaj & Kaur, 2023), is especially significant for a spatial reading of the novel. The phrase "under my roof" transforms the household into a symbolic geography of belonging. The roof does not merely designate the physical structure of the house; it represents protection, familial recognition, legitimacy, and inclusion. To remain beneath the roof is to retain membership within the family space, whereas expulsion from beneath it signifies the withdrawal of that recognition. Deepa's removal from the household therefore constitutes a form of social displacement before geographical displacement.

This moment is particularly important to the article's concept of spatial unbelonging because Deepa's displacement occurs through a sequence of increasingly expansive boundaries. Her first displacement is familial, as her relationship with Raza causes her to lose acceptance within the household. Her second displacement is communal, as her identity becomes increasingly positioned against the religious community to which her family belongs. Her third displacement is geographical, as the broader conditions of Partition transform the possibility of remaining securely within the familiar homeland. The sequence can therefore be represented as:

Familial displacement → Communal displacement → Geographical displacement

This progression demonstrates why Partition cannot be understood exclusively as migration across an internationally recognized boundary. Physical migration represents the culmination of a process that may begin much earlier through the erosion of belonging within domestic and social spaces. Deepa's experience illustrates that an individual can become displaced while still physically present within the homeland. Once the household withdraws recognition, and once the surrounding community begins to classify the individual according to religious identity, geographical presence no longer guarantees belonging. Spatial unbelonging thus emerges before the individual necessarily crosses a national border.

The significance of Deepa's experience becomes even clearer in the marketplace scene, where communal bordering extends beyond the household into public and commercial space. When the shopkeeper refuses to deal with Deepa and Raza, the marketplace ceases to function as a neutral space of ordinary economic interaction and becomes a site where communal identity determines inclusion and exclusion. The existing criticism identifies the shopkeeper's rejection through the expression “you people” as evidence of the transformation of individual relationships into collective identities. The significance of this expression extends beyond its immediate interpersonal context because the pronoun constructs a symbolic spatial division between an imagined “we” and an excluded “you.”

The linguistic structure can consequently be represented as:

$$We \rightarrow inside \rightarrow belonging$$
$$You \rightarrow outside \rightarrow exclusion$$

The distinction demonstrates how communal bordering can be produced through language before it is formalized through territorial boundaries. The word “you” creates distance by converting an individual into a representative of an allegedly distinct collective. Deepa and Raza are no longer encountered simply as two individuals participating in an ordinary commercial interaction; they are categorized through communal identity and consequently positioned outside the imagined boundaries of the dominant social group. The marketplace thus becomes a microcosm of the larger Partition process, in which distinctions between communities are progressively transformed into distinctions between spaces of belonging and exclusion.

Deepa's experience therefore demonstrates the relationship between linguistic bordering and spatial bordering. Before a political border separates territories, everyday language can produce symbolic boundaries between people. Expressions such as “your people” or “you people” construct an opposition between insiders and outsiders and transform social difference into spatial distance. Such linguistic practices become particularly consequential during periods of communal polarization because they normalize the idea that particular individuals belong naturally to particular collective spaces. The national border subsequently gives territorial form to distinctions that have already been socially produced.

Deepa's relationship with Raza can therefore be understood as a form of spatial transgression because it crosses a boundary that communal ideology attempts to stabilize. Their relationship creates an interpersonal space that does not correspond neatly to the religious geography emerging around them. The relationship consequently challenges the assumption that belonging must follow religious identity. Rather than accepting the equation between religion and territory, Deepa's experience demonstrates that intimacy can create alternative spaces of belonging that cross communal boundaries.

The contrast between the household and the marketplace is particularly significant. The household represents the private regulation of belonging, while the marketplace represents its public regulation. In both spaces, however, the same bordering logic operates: identity determines inclusion. Deepa's expulsion from the household and the shopkeeper's rejection in the marketplace demonstrate that communal bordering is reproduced across different scales of social space. The domestic and commercial spaces are therefore connected to the broader political geography of Partition through a shared logic of classification and exclusion.

Deepa's trajectory consequently reinforces the article's central argument that Partition begins as a process of bordering before it becomes a fully institutionalized territorial border. Her displacement starts within the home, expands into the community, and ultimately acquires a geographical dimension. The spatial violence she experiences is therefore not limited to physical movement; it involves the progressive withdrawal of recognition from the spaces through which she previously understood herself to belong. At the same time, her relationship with Raza demonstrates the possibility of challenging communal geography through interpersonal attachment. Deepa thus occupies a crucial position within the article's movement from belonging to bordering, from bordering to spatial unbelonging, and from exclusion toward the possibility of alternative forms of belonging.

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X. "YOUR PEOPLE": THE PRODUCTION OF THE COMMUNAL OTHER

Another significant moment in Independence occurs when a personal experience of loss is transformed into a communal accusation: "My husband went to help you and then your people killed him" (Divakaruni, 2023, p. 198). The expression "your people" is particularly significant because it shifts the object of accusation from an identifiable individual to an entire community. Rather than attributing responsibility to a specific person who committed an act of violence, the statement constructs collective responsibility on the basis of religious identity. Individual identity is consequently absorbed into communal identity, and the distinction between the person and the group to which that person is perceived to belong begins to disappear.

The spatial implications of this linguistic transformation are considerable. Once an individual is identified through the category of "your people," a symbolic boundary is established between the speaker and the person being addressed. The statement produces an imagined communal outside by positioning one group as responsible for the violence experienced by another. The neighbour who was previously encountered as an individual within a shared social environment is transformed into a representative of an entire community. The social geography of the village consequently begins to change from a relationship structured through neighbour–neighbour familiarity to one increasingly organized through Hindu–Muslim difference. What was previously a shared space becomes a divided social space.

This transformation illustrates the operation of bordering at the level of everyday language. Bordering does not require the immediate presence of a physical barrier; it can be produced through categories, pronouns, accusations, and assumptions that distinguish insiders from outsiders. The expression "your people" establishes precisely such a distinction. The possessive pronoun "your" creates distance between the speaker and the person addressed, while "people" converts an individual into a collective representative. Language therefore performs the preliminary work of territorial division by establishing social categories that can subsequently be mapped onto geographical space.

The significance of this process becomes clearer when the changing social geography of the novel is represented as:

Neighbour ↔ *Neighbour*
↓
Individual ↔ *Religious Collective*
↓
Hindu ↔ *Muslim*
↓
Insider ↔ *Outsider*

The progression demonstrates how communal categorization gradually transforms everyday coexistence into spatial division. The physical village may remain unchanged, but its social geography is fundamentally altered. Familiarity gives way to suspicion, shared space becomes contested space, and individual relationships are increasingly interpreted through collective identities. The border therefore becomes socially present before it becomes fully territorially institutionalized.

Recent studies on Partition similarly emphasize the importance of examining how ordinary social relationships were transformed through communal categorization. Anam's comparative analysis of Bengal literature demonstrates how religious, linguistic, national, and regional allegiances became increasingly unstable through processes of migration and border formation. Such an approach is valuable because it reveals that Partition did not simply divide territories; it also destabilized previously existing forms of social identification. The significance of Divakaruni's contribution lies in translating this broader historical process into intimate interpersonal encounters.

In Independence, the communal Other is therefore not produced exclusively by political institutions or formal territorial boundaries. The Other emerges within conversations, family relationships, neighbourhood interactions, and everyday encounters. The statement "your people" exemplifies this transformation because it demonstrates how grief and violence can be redirected into collective identification. Personal loss becomes communal accusation, and communal accusation contributes to the production of social boundaries. The individual is consequently no longer encountered simply as a person but as a representative of an imagined collective.

This process is central to the article's understanding of spatial violence. When communal categories transform the social meaning of everyday spaces, violence becomes spatial even when no physical boundary has yet been erected. The neighbourhood is divided through suspicion; the marketplace becomes organized through exclusion; and the household becomes a site where communal belonging is negotiated. The production of the communal Other

therefore contributes directly to the unmaking of shared space.

Divakaruni's representation is particularly significant because the transformation occurs through intimate relationships rather than through abstract political description. The novel demonstrates how a large-scale historical process becomes meaningful through the smallest units of social interaction. Partition consequently appears not only as the division of Bengal but as the gradual destruction of the relational geography that had enabled individuals to recognize one another as neighbours, friends, family members, and fellow members of a shared community. The production of the communal Other thus marks a crucial stage in the movement from social coexistence to communal bordering and, ultimately, spatial unbelonging.

XI. JAMINI: THE DESTRUCTION OF DOMESTIC SPACE

Jamini's experience provides one of the clearest representations of spatial violence in Independence because the political violence of Partition becomes directly inscribed upon the domestic environment and the female body. Existing criticism records that Jamini's home is destroyed during communal violence and that she is physically injured in the process. The destruction of the house is therefore significant not merely as an episode of material loss but as the collapse of the protective structure through which Jamini understands home, family, and security. The household, which conventionally functions as a space of refuge and continuity, becomes instead a site through which national and communal violence enters intimate life.

The destruction of the house produces several simultaneous forms of loss. Jamini loses physical shelter, family security, bodily safety, social recognition, and the assumption that home can provide protection. These losses demonstrate why the concept of spatial violence must extend beyond the destruction of physical structures. A house becomes a home through the relationships, memories, routines, and expectations attached to it. When the house is destroyed, therefore, the consequences extend beyond the material structure itself. What is damaged is an entire network of relationships and meanings that has made the space inhabitable and secure. The burning or destruction of a house consequently represents not simply a damaged building but the destruction of a social world.

Jamini's experience illustrates the central relationship between the macro-politics of Partition and the micro-geography of domestic life. Political violence is experienced through an ordinary structure—the family home. The national conflict does not remain distant from Jamini; it becomes materialized through the destruction of the very space in which she expects safety. The house thus functions as a point of convergence between territorial violence and intimate experience. The destruction of domestic space makes visible the process through which a political event becomes an embodied experience of fear, loss, and displacement.

The episode also demonstrates the gendered nature of spatial violence. Jamini's body becomes vulnerable alongside the destruction of the household, revealing the intimate relationship between domestic space and bodily security. During communal violence, women's bodies can become symbolic territories upon which collective identities, honour, humiliation, and revenge are inscribed. Biswas (2024) similarly emphasizes the gendered vulnerability of women within Partition narratives, demonstrating the importance of examining women's experiences as a distinct dimension of Partition violence. In Independence, the vulnerability of Jamini's body therefore cannot be separated from the destruction of her domestic environment. The violence simultaneously attacks the physical structure that constitutes her home and the bodily integrity through which she experiences that home.

The relationship between house and body is particularly significant for the present study because it reveals how spatial violence operates across different scales. The house functions as a larger protected space, while the body represents the most intimate form of personal space. When both are violated simultaneously, the distinction between public political violence and private suffering collapses. The destruction of the house and the injury to Jamini's body demonstrate that Partition can transform the spaces of everyday life into sites of vulnerability. Domestic space therefore ceases to function as a boundary separating the individual from political violence; instead, it becomes the very location through which political violence is experienced.

Yet Jamini's trajectory does not end with victimhood. Existing studies notes that Divakaruni refuses to reduce Jamini to a passive victim and instead represents her survival and persistence as forms of resistance. From the perspective of spatiality, this resistance can be understood as the reconstruction of relational space after the destruction of physical space. When the original domestic environment can no longer guarantee security or continuity, Jamini's capacity to sustain relationships, memory, and familial connections becomes a means of reconstructing belonging. Resistance consequently does not require the restoration of the destroyed house in its original

form. It can emerge through the creation of alternative spaces of care, relationship, and cultural continuity.

Jamini therefore occupies a crucial position within the article's movement from spatial violence to re-belonging. Her experience demonstrates the destructive capacity of Partition to transform home into a site of danger, while her persistence demonstrates that the destruction of physical space does not necessarily result in the complete destruction of belonging. The relational dimensions of home can survive even when its material structure has been violated. Jamini's story consequently reinforces the central argument of this study: spatial violence can unmake physical and social environments, but human agency can create alternative relational spaces through which belonging is reconstructed.

In this sense, Jamini's experience complements Priya's and Deepa's trajectories. Priya challenges the gendered boundaries of domestic and professional space; Deepa challenges communal boundaries through intimate relationship; Jamini confronts the destruction of domestic space itself and participates in the reconstruction of belonging after that destruction. Together, the three sisters demonstrate different forms of spatial negotiation within the historical conditions of Partition: Priya — crossing gendered spatial boundaries, Deepa — crossing communal spatial boundaries, and Jamini — reconstructing belonging after spatial destruction

Through these three trajectories, Independence presents women's experiences of Partition not only as experiences of trauma and loss but also as struggles over access to space, recognition within space, and the reconstruction of space after violence.

XII. GENDERED DOMESTIC SPACE AND THE POLITICS OF PROTECTION

Domestic space in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Independence is fundamentally ambivalent. The household can function as a space of protection, emotional continuity, and cultural identity, but it can simultaneously operate as a mechanism of gendered confinement and exclusion. Such ambivalence is crucial to understanding the spatial politics of the novel because the home cannot be categorized simply as either a safe or an oppressive space. Its meaning changes according to the character's position within familial, gendered, and communal structures. The experiences of Priya, Deepa, and Jamini consequently demonstrate three different relationships between women and domestic space: restriction, expulsion, and destruction.

For Priya, the household initially represents a restrictive spatial structure because domestic expectations limit her educational and professional aspirations. The conventional association between womanhood and the domestic sphere places boundaries around the spaces she is expected to occupy. Her desire to pursue medicine therefore requires movement beyond the household and access to educational and professional institutions. Priya's struggle demonstrates that domestic space can become a form of spatial confinement when social expectations determine that a woman's legitimate place is within the home. Her pursuit of professional identity consequently represents an attempt to expand the spatial possibilities available to women.

Deepa's experience reveals a different dimension of domestic power. The household does not merely confine her; it becomes a space from which she can be excluded. Her relationship with Raza challenges the communal expectations of her family, resulting in the withdrawal of familial recognition. The earlier command to leave the household demonstrates that domestic belonging is conditional upon conformity to communal and familial norms. Deepa's experience therefore exposes the politics of protection embedded within the home: the household can provide security only so long as the individual remains within the boundaries established by those who control it. Once those boundaries are challenged, the same space that represents belonging can become a mechanism of expulsion.

Jamini's relationship with domestic space is different again. For her, the household functions primarily as a space of safety and familial continuity, making its destruction during communal violence particularly devastating. The destruction of the house removes not merely physical shelter but also the spatial structure through which security and belonging have been organized. Jamini's experience demonstrates that domestic protection is vulnerable to political violence. The home cannot remain insulated from the larger spatial transformations produced by Partition. When communal violence enters domestic space, the distinction between the supposedly protected private sphere and the dangerous public sphere collapses.

The three trajectories therefore reveal the multiple meanings of domestic space in the novel: Priya — home as restriction, Deepa — home as conditional belonging and expulsion, and Jamini — home as protection and violent vulnerability

This complexity prevents a simplistic interpretation of domestic space as either inherently protective or inherently oppressive. The household simultaneously functions as refuge, prison, identity, and vulnerable territory. Its protective capacity derives from familial relationships and emotional attachment, while its restrictive capacity emerges from patriarchal and

communal expectations. Its vulnerability becomes apparent when political violence penetrates the boundaries of the household. Domestic space is therefore produced through competing relations of care, authority, belonging, and exclusion.

Recent studies on homemaking after displacement similarly emphasizes that home is produced through material, emotional, cultural, and narrative practices rather than being reducible to a physical structure (Beeckmans et al., 2022). This perspective is particularly useful for interpreting Independence because the sisters' experiences demonstrate that the meaning of home exceeds the physical boundaries of the house. Home is constituted through relationships, memories, cultural practices, and emotional attachments, all of which can survive—or be transformed—when the material structure of domestic space changes.

The sisters' differing experiences consequently reveal three distinct responses to the politics of domestic space. Priya seeks to move beyond the restrictive boundaries of the household; Deepa is expelled from the household when communal expectations override familial acceptance; and Jamini attempts to survive after the physical destruction of the household. Their trajectories demonstrate that the politics of protection is inseparable from the politics of access and belonging. The question is not simply whether women have a home, but under what conditions they are permitted to enter, remain within, leave, or reconstruct that home.

Domestic space in Independence thus becomes a microcosm of the larger spatial politics of Partition. Just as the political border distinguishes territories between insiders and outsiders, domestic boundaries can distinguish between those who are protected and those who are excluded. Yet, unlike a fixed territorial boundary, domestic space remains negotiable and relational. Priya expands its boundaries through professional mobility, Deepa crosses its communal expectations through intimate attachment, and Jamini reconstructs relational belonging after its material destruction. Through these contrasting trajectories, Divakaruni demonstrates that women's independence involves not only freedom from patriarchal restrictions but also the ability to negotiate, cross, resist, and reconstruct the spaces through which belonging is produced.

XIII. THE VILLAGE AS A CONTESTED SPACE

The village constitutes another significant spatial category in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Independence. Before the intensification of communal polarization, the village functions as a shared social environment in which everyday interactions, familial relationships, commerce, and community life operate through relatively familiar patterns of coexistence. Its significance lies not merely in its geographical location but in the social relationships attached to it. The village represents a lived geography in which individuals recognize one another through proximity, familiarity, shared routines, and established social connections. Partition-related communal tensions progressively disrupt this spatial order, transforming the village from a relatively cohesive social environment into a contested space.

As communal violence intensifies, the meaning of the village changes across several interconnected dimensions. The village becomes increasingly divided, suspicious, unsafe, and religiously marked. These changes demonstrate that communal violence is not simply an eruption of physical violence imposed upon an otherwise unchanged environment. Rather, violence reorganizes the social meaning of place. A geographical location can remain materially intact while its inhabitants experience it in radically different ways. The transformation of the village therefore illustrates the distinction between physical continuity and social discontinuity: the streets, houses, and marketplaces may remain recognizable, but the relationships and meanings associated with those spaces are fundamentally altered.

This transformation can be understood through a series of spatial reversals:

The same street → becomes threatening
The same neighbour → becomes an enemy
The same marketplace → becomes exclusionary
The same home → becomes vulnerable

The significance of these reversals lies in their demonstration that spatial violence does not necessarily require the immediate destruction of physical infrastructure. The violence can occur through the transformation of how people perceive, access, and inhabit existing spaces. A street becomes threatening when movement through it is shaped by fear; a neighbour becomes an enemy when communal identity supersedes interpersonal familiarity; a marketplace becomes exclusionary when economic interaction is regulated by religious categorization; and a home becomes vulnerable when the surrounding environment can no longer guarantee security. Space is therefore transformed through changing social relations.

The village consequently becomes an important site for understanding the relationship between bordering and social production. The communal border is produced through everyday interactions before it becomes a fully institutionalized territorial boundary. Religious categorization, suspicion, exclusion, and restrictions on movement gradually divide a

previously shared social environment. The border is consequently not merely imposed upon the village from outside; it is reproduced within the village through the behaviour and perceptions of its inhabitants. This process corresponds to the article's broader argument that Partition involves "bordering before the border." The territorial division acquires social reality because people begin to organize their relationships and movements according to communal distinctions.

The transformation of the village also demonstrates why spatiality provides a productive extension of existing gender- and trauma-centred readings of Independence. Trauma occurs within particular spaces, while gendered vulnerability is intensified by the transformation of domestic and public environments. The village provides the larger spatial framework within which the experiences of Priya, Deepa, and Jamini become intelligible. Priya's movement beyond domestic restrictions, Deepa's communal exclusion, and Jamini's experience of domestic destruction are not isolated events; each is connected to the changing social geography of the village.

Recent studies on Bengal Partition further demonstrates the complex relationship between territory, displacement, refugee identity, and community. Jorapur and Chatterjee (2023), for example, show that the experiences of Dalit refugees cannot be separated from questions of caste, displacement, and access to space. Such studies is significant because it demonstrates that the consequences of Partition were shaped by intersecting social hierarchies rather than by religious identity alone. Access to land, settlement, resources, and recognition could be influenced by caste as well as by communal and political conditions.

Although the present article focuses primarily on spatiality rather than caste, this intersectional perspective remains useful for understanding the broader implications of contested space in Independence. Space is never experienced uniformly by all subjects. Gender, religion, class, caste, and social status can influence who is protected, who is excluded, and who can move freely through particular environments. The spatial approach adopted here therefore does not suggest that Partition produced an identical experience of unbelonging for everyone. Instead, it establishes spatial transformation as the principal analytical category through which different forms of vulnerability and belonging can be examined.

The village in Independence consequently functions as a micro-geography of Partition. Its transformation from shared environment to contested space reproduces, on an intimate scale, the larger territorial logic of Partition. The changing village demonstrates how political division becomes embedded in ordinary places and relationships, converting familiarity into suspicion and coexistence into exclusion. Divakaruni thereby represents Partition not simply as the division of territory but as the reorganization of lived space itself. The village becomes contested because the meanings of belonging, safety, and community have been transformed. This spatial transformation ultimately contributes to the condition of spatial unbelonging that defines the experiences of those whose relationship with home has been disrupted by Partition.

XIV. DISPLACEMENT AND THE CRISIS OF BELONGING

Displacement is conventionally represented as a movement from one geographical location to another: the displaced individual leaves one place and arrives in a new location. Such a formulation, however, risks reducing displacement to physical mobility and overlooking the more complex crisis of belonging that accompanies the loss or transformation of home. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Independence presents displacement as a condition that extends beyond geographical movement. The central question confronting the displaced subject is therefore not simply "Where will I go?" but "Where do I belong now?" This distinction is crucial to the present study because it shifts attention from migration as physical movement to displacement as a disruption of the relationship between individuals and the spaces through which identity and belonging are constructed.

Pearlman (2023) demonstrates that belonging can persist, disappear, or become fragmented between homeland and exile. Such a formulation is particularly relevant to the experiences represented in Independence, where the relationship between the characters and their former home cannot be understood through a simple opposition between presence and absence. Physical separation from a familiar place may produce profound emotional attachment to that place, while continued physical presence may coexist with a growing sense of alienation. Belonging therefore becomes unstable when the geographical, social, and affective dimensions of home no longer correspond.

Research on transnational families similarly demonstrates that home can retain emotional significance across geographical and generational distances through family relationships and cultural continuity. Such findings illuminate the significance of home in Independence because they demonstrate that displacement does not necessarily erase attachment to the place left behind. Memories,

relationships, cultural practices, and family histories can preserve connections with a former home even when physical return is difficult or impossible. Home consequently becomes simultaneously absent as a physical location and present as an emotional and cultural reference point.

This condition produces a significant gap between geographical location and affective belonging. A displaced individual may physically inhabit a new place without immediately experiencing that place as home. The new location may provide shelter, employment, or physical security while remaining emotionally unfamiliar. Conversely, the former homeland may remain emotionally meaningful despite the loss of physical access. Displacement therefore produces a spatial paradox: the place where the individual physically exists may not be the place to which the individual feels attached, while the place that continues to function as an emotional home may no longer be geographically accessible.

The distinction can be represented as follows:

Physical displacement
↓
Separation from established home
↓
Disruption of social and cultural continuity
↓
Gap between geographical location and affective belonging
↓
Spatial unbelonging

The concept of spatial unbelonging, as developed in this article, refers precisely to this condition in which geographical presence and affective belonging become disconnected. Spatial unbelonging is therefore not synonymous with homelessness or physical displacement. A person may have a physical residence while experiencing profound unbelonging, just as a person separated from a homeland may continue to maintain a strong affective relationship with it. The concept consequently captures the psychological, social, cultural, and geographical dimensions of displacement simultaneously.

This distinction is particularly productive for reading the experiences of the Ganguly sisters. Partition transforms the relationship between their identities and the spaces in which those identities have been formed. The disruption of home consequently creates a crisis that cannot be resolved simply through relocation. New spaces must become meaningful before they can function as homes, and such meaning is produced through relationships, memory, cultural continuity, and everyday practices. The question of belonging therefore becomes a continuing process rather than a condition automatically restored through geographical movement.

Independence consequently challenges the assumption that displacement has a clear beginning and endpoint. Displacement begins when established relationships between people and places become unstable and may continue even after physical relocation. The displaced subject can remain caught between remembered home and present location, between attachment and estrangement, and between the desire for continuity and the necessity of adaptation. This condition makes displacement fundamentally a crisis of spatial belonging.

The concept also prepares the ground for the article's subsequent discussion of memory and re-belonging. If displacement creates a gap between geographical location and affective belonging, memory can become one mechanism through which the relationship with the lost or transformed home is maintained. At the same time, relationships, professional identities, and cultural practices can provide alternative spaces through which new forms of belonging are constructed. Independence therefore presents displacement not simply as the movement away from home but as a prolonged negotiation between loss, memory, adaptation, and the reconstruction of belonging.

XV. MEMORY AS A COUNTER-SPACE

If political power can destroy or transform physical home, memory can preserve its symbolic geography. In the context of Bengal Partition, memory provides an important means through which displaced individuals maintain relationships with places that are no longer physically accessible. The significance of memory therefore extends beyond recollection of past events. Memory can preserve the social relationships, cultural practices, emotional attachments, and everyday experiences through which a particular location acquired the meaning of home. From the spatial perspective adopted in this study, memory consequently functions as a counter-space: it creates an alternative form of spatial continuity when geographical continuity has been disrupted.

Recent studies on Bengal Partition strongly emphasizes the relationship between memory, displacement, and lost homeland. Gupta (2020), for example, argues that the Bengali refugee may remain mentally anchored to the lost homeland even after physical migration. Such an understanding is particularly relevant to Independence, where the significance of home cannot be measured solely by continued geographical occupation. The physical location may become inaccessible, politically transformed, or permanently associated with loss,

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while its emotional and cultural significance continues through memory. Memory thus enables displaced subjects to maintain an attachment to a geography that no longer exists in the same form.

Clini et al. (2024) similarly demonstrate how inherited Partition memories continue to influence diasporic identity, community, and belonging. Their emphasis on inherited memory is particularly significant because it demonstrates that relationships with lost spaces can extend beyond the generation that directly experienced displacement. Hornabrook et al. (2024) further develop this perspective through their examination of transnational memory practices connecting Bengal and Britain. Such research demonstrates that Partition memory can move across geographical and generational boundaries, allowing displaced communities to maintain relationships with places through narratives, cultural practices, and inherited memories.

In Independence, literary memory functions in a comparable manner. The narrative reconstructs the lost or transformed social world through family relationships, domestic routines, cultural practices, food, women's labour, village life, and emotional attachment. These details are significant because they reconstruct home not as an abstract geographical territory but as a lived social environment. A remembered village consists not merely of its physical boundaries but also of the people who inhabited it, the routines they followed, the food they prepared, the labour they performed, and the relationships they maintained. Literary memory consequently restores the social geography of home even when its physical geography has been disrupted.

The remembered home therefore becomes a counter-space. It challenges the assumption that the creation of a new territorial boundary completely erases the previous geography. Political borders may reorganize territory, but they cannot necessarily eliminate the memories attached to that territory. Through narrative recollection, the social world that existed before Partition can continue to circulate within the consciousness of individuals and communities. Memory consequently creates a form of spatial continuity that exists alongside, and sometimes in opposition to, the new political geography.

The relationship can be represented as:

Physical home disrupted
↓
Geographical displacement
↓
Memory of home
↓
Reconstruction of social geography
↓
Counter-space of belonging

The significance of memory in Independence therefore extends beyond nostalgia. Nostalgia may involve longing for a lost past, whereas the counter-spatial function of memory involves actively preserving relationships with place. By reconstructing domestic routines, family relationships, cultural practices, and village life, memory allows the lost home to remain socially meaningful. The remembered home survives in narrative even when its geographical conditions have been fundamentally transformed.

XVI. CULTURAL OBJECTS AND THE MATERIALITY OF HOME

The counter-spatial function of memory becomes even more significant when memory is understood through its material dimensions. Memory is not exclusively a mental or psychological process. Objects, domestic practices, photographs, food, clothing, religious materials, and other everyday things can carry memories of home across geographical rupture. Recent studies on displaced communities and homemaking emphasizes the significance of material objects, domestic practices, and memory in reconstructing relationships with home after displacement. Such objects can provide continuity when the physical environment associated with them has been lost.

The wider Bengal Partition archive provides an especially useful comparative framework for understanding this material dimension. Sengupta's research records the experience of a displaced family carrying photographs, a flower pot, prayer beads, and house keys as representations of “home.” These objects are significant precisely because they condense a larger spatial world into portable forms. The house keys, for example, can signify access to a lost domestic space; photographs can preserve relationships and physical environments; prayer beads can maintain cultural and spiritual continuity; and a flower pot can carry an element of domestic familiarity into an unfamiliar environment. The object therefore becomes more than a possession: it becomes a material carrier of spatial memory.

This framework provides a productive comparative basis for reading the cultural objects and domestic practices represented in Independence. The

significance of material culture lies in its capacity to preserve aspects of home that geographical displacement threatens to destroy. A photograph can preserve the visual memory of a household; a domestic object can retain associations with family members and everyday routines; food can preserve cultural practices; and ritual can reproduce continuity across disrupted geographical environments.

The concept of portable geography is particularly useful here. When people are displaced, they cannot necessarily carry their entire physical environment with them. Yet selected objects and practices can carry fragments of that environment into new spaces. In this sense:

Photograph → preserves household and relationships
Domestic object → preserves everyday familiarity
Food → preserves cultural memory
Ritual → preserves cultural continuity
Storytelling → preserves social geography

The material object consequently becomes a small-scale representation of a larger lost geography. A photograph does not physically reproduce the former home, but it can preserve an image of the people and relationships associated with it. A domestic object cannot recreate an entire household, but it can maintain a sensory and emotional connection with that household. A cultural practice cannot restore the original village, but it can reproduce elements of the social world that made the village meaningful.

The distinction between memory as mental reconstruction and memory as material practice is therefore important to the present study. When memory becomes embodied in objects and practices, it can be enacted repeatedly within new environments. The displaced subject does not simply remember the former home internally; elements of that home can be incorporated into everyday life elsewhere. Homemaking thus becomes a process of carrying, adapting, and reproducing fragments of an earlier spatial world.

This material dimension also strengthens the article's concept of re-belonging. If spatial unbelonging results from the rupture between individuals and their established environments, material objects and cultural practices can help create continuity within new spaces. The new location may initially be experienced as unfamiliar, but the incorporation of remembered objects, routines, food, stories, and rituals can gradually transform it into a meaningful environment. Re-belonging therefore does not require the exact restoration of the lost home. It can occur through the reconstruction of selected elements of home within another space.

Memory and materiality consequently constitute two interconnected forms of counter-space in Independence. Memory preserves the symbolic geography of the lost home, while objects and cultural practices give that memory material and everyday form. Together, they demonstrate that Partition cannot completely erase the spatial worlds it attempts to divide. The political border may reorganize territory, but memory, material culture, and cultural practice can preserve and reproduce relationships with the displaced home. This process marks an important transition in the novel from spatial unbelonging toward re-belonging, as displaced subjects begin to construct alternative forms of home from the fragments of a disrupted past.

XVII. RE-BELONGING AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF SPACE

The concept of re-belonging is essential to understanding the spatial consequences of Partition in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Independence because displacement does not necessarily produce permanent unbelonging. Although Partition destroys or destabilizes established relationships between individuals and their homes, displaced subjects can develop alternative forms of social, cultural, professional, and affective attachment. Re-belonging, therefore, does not imply a simple restoration of the pre-Partition home. Rather, it refers to the process through which individuals reconstruct meaningful relationships with people, institutions, practices, and places after the disruption of established spatial identities.

Recent studies on refugee settlements demonstrates that displaced communities can produce new forms of social and political space rather than remaining permanently defined by loss. Banerjee (2025), for example, demonstrates how Bengali refugees developed collective forms of organization and imagined alternative political structures following Partition. Such evidence is significant because it complicates the representation of refugees as merely displaced subjects without agency. Displacement can destroy established communities, but it can also generate new forms of collective organization and belonging. The refugee settlement consequently becomes more than a temporary location: it can develop into a new social space through which identity, community, and political participation are reconstructed.

This insight is particularly productive for reading Independence. The three Ganguly sisters respond differently to the disruption of established spaces, but each develops a distinctive form of re-belonging. Priya reconstructs belonging through professional identity;

Deepa negotiates belonging through intimate and cross-communal relationships; and Jamini reconstructs belonging through survival, family, and relational continuity. Their trajectories demonstrate that the reconstruction of belonging does not require the simple replacement of one geographical home with another. Instead, new forms of home emerge through relationships, institutions, cultural practices, and individual agency.

The three trajectories can therefore be conceptualized as:

Priya → Professional re-belonging
Deepa → Cross-communal re-belonging
Jamini → Relational re-belonging

The significance of these trajectories lies in their demonstration that home is a process rather than a fixed location. The destinations reached by the characters do not simply substitute for the lost home. Instead, new spaces acquire meaning through the activities and relationships developed within them. Re-belonging consequently involves the transformation of unfamiliar or contested environments into meaningful spaces of identity and participation.

A. Professional Space and the Reconstruction of Belonging

Priya's medical career represents one of the most significant forms of counter-space in the novel because it challenges both patriarchal restrictions and the gendered organization of public life. Existing 2026 studies describes Priya's medical practice as a form of "restorative citizenship." The present study extends this interpretation spatially by examining what it means for a woman to occupy a professional and civic space historically associated with male authority.

The medical institution becomes simultaneously a professional space, civic space, space of service, and space of female agency. Priya's movement from the household into medical education and professional practice therefore represents more than career development. It constitutes a transformation of the gendered geography through which women's participation in public life is regulated. By occupying professional space, Priya challenges the assumption that women's social identity must remain centred upon domesticity.

Her medical practice also provides an alternative basis for belonging. Rather than deriving identity exclusively from family or domestic location, Priya develops a professional identity through which she participates in wider civic life. Professional space consequently becomes a counter-space that enables her to establish social recognition beyond the household.

Priya's trajectory can therefore be understood as:

Domestic enclosure → Education → Professional mobility → Civic participation → Spatial independence

The significance of this trajectory extends to the question of citizenship. Citizenship is not meaningful solely as a legal status; it also depends upon the ability to participate in the spaces of public life. Priya demonstrates that spatial access is an important condition of meaningful citizenship. Her professional mobility therefore becomes a form of independence through which gendered spatial boundaries are challenged.

B. Deepa and Cross-Communal Re-Belonging

Deepa's relationship with Raza represents a different form of counter-space. The communal order increasingly attempts to define belonging through religious identity, transforming social relationships into boundaries between communities. Deepa's relationship challenges this logic by creating an intimate space in which Hindu and Muslim identities can coexist without being reduced to mutually exclusive categories.

The relationship can therefore be understood through the concept of diaspora space, associated with Avtar Brah, in which boundaries between belonging and otherness are continuously negotiated. Recent literary studies continues to apply diaspora-space theory to narratives in which cultural and ethnic boundaries are contested (Sakiz, 2023). Within this framework, Deepa and Raza's relationship creates a relational space that communal ideology attempts to make impossible.

Deepa's relationship therefore represents a form of spatial transgression. The communal order attempts to establish a rigid correspondence between religion, community, and social space, while Deepa's intimacy disrupts that correspondence. Her relationship demonstrates that interpersonal belonging does not necessarily follow political or religious boundaries. Love becomes a form of spatial resistance because it produces an alternative social space in which the boundaries between "us" and "them" are challenged.

The significance of Deepa's trajectory is consequently not limited to the romantic dimension of her relationship. Her experience demonstrates the possibility of constructing relational spaces that exceed communal geography. Such spaces are fragile and vulnerable to external political pressures, but their very existence challenges the assumption that Partition can completely determine the boundaries of human belonging.

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C. Jamini and Relational Re-Belonging

Jamini's reconstruction of belonging is more explicitly domestic and relational. Her experience demonstrates that physical space can be destroyed without necessarily eliminating the possibility of relational belonging. The destruction of the house represents the collapse of material shelter, but it does not automatically destroy the relationships, memories, and forms of care through which home is experienced.

The distinction between house and home is therefore fundamental to Jamini's trajectory. A house can disappear while belonging survives; a family can be fractured while relationships can still be rebuilt. Recent research on home and displacement similarly emphasizes that homemaking involves emotional, social, cultural, and material labour rather than simply occupying a physical building. Jamini's experience illustrates this distinction particularly clearly.

Her form of re-belonging can therefore be described as relational re-belonging. Instead of attempting to recover the original physical structure of home, Jamini's survival is connected to the reconstruction of relationships and continuity. Family, memory, care, and interpersonal attachment become alternative foundations for belonging.

Jamini consequently challenges the assumption that displaced individuals must recover their original geographical home in order to recover their identity. Her trajectory demonstrates that belonging can be reconstructed through relational practices even after physical space has been destroyed. The recovery of identity therefore becomes possible through the reconstruction of social and affective space.

D. Partition and the Politics of Citizenship

The destruction and reconstruction of home inevitably raise the broader question of citizenship. A political state defines territorial belonging by establishing who belongs within a particular geographical and political territory. Partition radically transformed this relationship by converting people who had previously inhabited a shared political geography into populations associated with different national territories. The resulting crisis was therefore not merely geographical. It was simultaneously legal, political, social, and affective.

Recent research on Bengali refugees demonstrates how displacement brought questions of state recognition, property, settlement, and political identity into everyday life (Sengupta, 2022; Banerjee, 2025). The refugee experience consequently demonstrates that citizenship is lived through space. Access to land, housing, settlement, public institutions, and community recognition can determine whether an individual experiences a particular territory as a place of belonging.

Independence dramatizes the human consequences of this transformation without reducing citizenship primarily to legal documents or formal political status. The novel instead approaches citizenship through the intimate consequences of territorial redefinition. The fundamental question becomes: What happens when the place you have always called home becomes politically redefined?

The answer provided through the spatial experiences of the characters is spatial unbelonging. A place can remain emotionally meaningful while becoming politically inaccessible; an individual can remain connected to a homeland while being treated as an outsider within the newly reorganized geography; and a new location can provide physical residence without immediately providing affective belonging.

At the same time, the novel suggests that citizenship and belonging can be reconstructed through alternative forms of spatial participation. Priya's professional service, Deepa's cross-communal intimacy, and Jamini's relational reconstruction each demonstrate different ways of creating meaningful social spaces after territorial and communal rupture. Citizenship, from this perspective, becomes more than legal membership: it involves the ability to inhabit, participate in, contribute to, and claim recognition within social spaces.

The combined trajectories of the three sisters therefore establish the central spatial argument of the article:

Partition → Spatial Violence → Unmaking of Home → Displacement → Spatial Unbelonging → Counter-Space → Re-Belonging

Independence ultimately demonstrates that the destruction of geographical home does not necessarily produce the permanent destruction of belonging. Priya reconstructs belonging through professional and civic space; Deepa challenges communal boundaries through intimate relational space; and Jamini reconstructs belonging through family, survival, and affective continuity. Their experiences reveal that re-belonging is not a return to an unchanged past but the creation of new spatial relationships after historical rupture. In this sense, Divakaruni's novel transforms Partition from a story of territorial division into a complex narrative of spatial destruction, contested citizenship, and the human reconstruction of home.

XVIII. BENGAL AND GLOBAL PARTITION STUDIES

Although Independence is firmly grounded in the historical and cultural context of Bengal, its spatial

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implications extend beyond the regional framework of Bengal Partition Studies and contribute to broader debates within Global Partition Studies. Comparative studies increasingly approaches partition not simply as an isolated historical event but as a recurring political process involving territorial division, forced migration, refugee formation, citizenship crises, communal violence, memory, border-making, and cultural reconstruction. From this broader perspective, the Bengal case becomes significant because it demonstrates how the creation of a territorial boundary can simultaneously reorganize the everyday spaces through which individuals understand identity, community, security, and home.

The significance of Bengal lies particularly in the distinction between territorial division and lived spatial transformation. Partition is conventionally represented through the image of a line drawn across a map. Such cartographic representation, however, can obscure the gradual transformation of social space that precedes and follows the drawing of the boundary. As Independence demonstrates, Partition reorganizes the meanings of villages, households, marketplaces, neighbourhoods, relationships, and bodies. The border therefore does not simply divide an already existing social geography; it participates in producing a new geography of inclusion and exclusion.

The Bengal experience is especially valuable for global Partition Studies because the region demonstrates the complex relationship between territorial borders and cultural continuity. Anam's comparative reading of Bengal literature demonstrates how Partition generated unstable relationships among religion, language, region, and national identity. Such instability reveals that political borders do not necessarily correspond to cultural boundaries. Communities can remain connected through language, food, memory, family relationships, cultural practices, and shared histories even after territorial division.

This condition produces an important paradox:

Political border → territorial separation
Cultural memory → continued connection
Social relationships → porous boundaries

Bengal therefore demonstrates that borders can be simultaneously divisive and porous. They can regulate movement and citizenship while failing to completely eliminate cultural and affective relationships across territories. This paradox is central to the spatial reading of Independence, where the political restructuring of Bengal produces new forms of exclusion while memories and relationships continue to connect individuals to spaces that have become geographically or politically inaccessible.

The Bengal case consequently contributes to comparative Partition Studies by shifting attention from the event of partition to the process of spatial reorganization. Such a shift allows literary narratives to become important sources for understanding how geopolitical decisions are experienced at the level of everyday life. Independence demonstrates that the consequences of Partition are visible not only in migration statistics, territorial maps, and political negotiations but also in the transformation of ordinary spaces into sites of fear, exclusion, memory, and reconstruction.

The novel therefore supports a broader proposition: partition is not simply the division of territory; it is the reorganization of lived space. This proposition provides a conceptual bridge between Bengal Partition Studies and Global Partition Studies and establishes the foundation for the theoretical model developed in the following section.

XIX. THEORETICAL MODEL: THE SPATIALITY OF UNBELONGING

The principal theoretical contribution of this article is the concept of the Spatiality of Unbelonging. The concept is developed from the spatial experiences represented in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Independence and is intended to extend existing approaches to Partition, displacement, memory, gender, and belonging.

A. Defining the Spatiality of Unbelonging

Spatiality of unbelonging describes a condition in which political and communal boundary-making transforms the relationship between people and place by simultaneously disrupting geographical, social, cultural, and affective belonging.

The concept is therefore broader than physical displacement. A person may remain geographically present within a familiar environment while becoming socially excluded from it. Conversely, a displaced individual may continue to maintain an affective and cultural relationship with a homeland that is no longer physically accessible. Spatial unbelonging emerges precisely within this disjunction between where one is located and where one experiences belonging.

The model identifies four interconnected dimensions:

1) Geographical dimension — loss of physical access to home or territory.
2) Social dimension — loss of communal recognition and participation.
3) Cultural dimension — disruption of practices, identities, and relationships associated with place.

4) Affective dimension — transformation of attachment into fear, grief, nostalgia, alienation, or estrangement.

The four dimensions interact rather than operate independently. The destruction of physical home can produce social exclusion; social exclusion can intensify affective alienation; and cultural disruption can deepen the sense of geographical loss. Spatial unbelonging is therefore a multidimensional condition produced through the interaction of political geography and lived experience.

B. Four Stages of the Model

The model can be represented through four sequential but overlapping stages:

Spatial Belonging → Bordering → Spatial Unbelonging → Re-Belonging

Stage 1: Spatial Belonging

At the first stage, home functions as a combination of:

Place + Family + Culture + Security

Home is not merely a physical structure. It represents a network of relationships, cultural practices, memories, emotional attachments, and expectations of safety. The village and household in Independence initially possess this multidimensional character.

Stage 2: Bordering

The second stage begins when communal and political forces reorganize the meaning of existing spaces.

Place → Territory

A lived environment increasingly becomes interpreted through political and communal categories. Religious identification, social suspicion, exclusion, marriage restrictions, and communal violence transform shared spaces into differentiated spaces. This is the stage at which bordering precedes the formal border.

The crucial transformation is therefore:

Shared space → Categorized space → Divided space

Stage 3: Spatial Unbelonging

The third stage occurs when the transformation of space produces:

Loss + Exclusion + Displacement + Fear

The subject may lose physical access to home, recognition within the community, cultural continuity, or emotional security. Spatial unbelonging therefore represents the point at which the relationship between subject and place becomes fundamentally fractured.

Importantly, this stage does not require complete geographical displacement. Deepa's expulsion from the household, for example, demonstrates how unbelonging can begin within the home itself. Similarly, Priya's experience demonstrates that remaining within a household does not necessarily guarantee spatial belonging when domestic space functions as a form of gendered restriction.

Stage 4: Re-Belonging

The final stage involves the reconstruction of meaningful relationships with space through:

Memory + Relationship + Cultural Practice + New Space

Re-belonging does not mean returning to an unchanged pre-Partition geography. Instead, it involves creating new forms of spatial attachment after rupture. Professional identity, intimate relationships, family continuity, cultural practices, memory, and civic participation can all become counter-spaces through which belonging is reconstructed.

The model can therefore be summarized as:

HOME
Place + Family + Culture + Security
↓
BORDERING
Communal categorization + Political division + Exclusion
↓
SPATIAL UNBELONGING
Loss + Fear + Displacement + Alienation
↓
RE-BELONGING
Memory + Relationships + Cultural Practice + New Spaces

C. Applying the Model to the Three Sisters

The three Ganguly sisters provide three distinct manifestations of the model:

Character	Spatial rupture	Dominant form of unbelonging	Form of re-belonging
Priya	Domestic restriction	Gendered limitation of access to public space	Professional and civic space
Deepa	Communal and familial exclusion	Religious and relational displacement	Cross-communal relational space
Jamini	Destruction of domestic space	Physical, bodily, and affective displacement	Relational and cultural space

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Priya's trajectory demonstrates that spatial unbelonging can emerge through confinement rather than geographical displacement. Her movement into medicine transforms professional space into a counter-space of independence and civic participation.

Deepa demonstrates that unbelonging can emerge through communal exclusion. Her relationship with Raza challenges the construction of religiously homogeneous spaces and creates the possibility of cross-communal belonging.

Jamini demonstrates the most direct relationship between physical destruction and relational reconstruction. The destruction of the house produces material and affective loss, yet belonging can be reconstructed through relationships, memory, survival, and cultural continuity.

The three trajectories therefore demonstrate that re-belonging takes different spatial forms according to the nature of the original rupture.

D. Theoretical Contribution

The Spatiality of Unbelonging model contributes to existing Partition studies in three principal ways.

First, it shifts the analytical focus from territorial borders to lived spatial transformation. Partition becomes visible not simply through the creation of national boundaries but through changes in how individuals inhabit and interpret everyday spaces.

Second, the model connects macro-political processes with micro-social experiences. Political decisions concerning territory and state formation become meaningful through their effects on households, villages, marketplaces, relationships, bodies, and memories.

Third, the model connects unbelonging with the possibility of re-belonging. Partition studies often emphasizes displacement, trauma, violence, and loss. While these dimensions remain essential, the spatial model demonstrates that displaced subjects also participate in reconstructing meaningful spaces through professional identities, relationships, cultural practices, memory, and new forms of community.

Consequently, Independence should not be read exclusively as a narrative of Partition trauma. It can also be understood as a narrative of spatial transformation and reconstruction. The novel traces a movement from the destruction of familiar spatial relations toward the creation of alternative forms of belonging.

The theoretical trajectory of the article can therefore be condensed into the following formulation:

Home → Bordering → Spatial Violence → Displacement → Spatial Unbelonging → Counter-Space → Re-Belonging

This model constitutes the article's principal conceptual intervention. It demonstrates that Partition operates simultaneously as a territorial event, social process, affective rupture, and spatial transformation, while also recognizing the capacity of individuals to reconstruct belonging after displacement. In Independence, the border may divide territory, but it cannot completely determine the boundaries of human belonging.

XX. DISCUSSION

The preceding analysis demonstrates that Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Independence represents Partition not as a single historical event but as a progressive transformation of lived space. The novel's representation of 1947 moves from the large-scale political division of Bengal to the intimate spaces of the household, village, marketplace, body, and memory. Such a spatial progression reveals how territorial reorganization becomes socially meaningful through everyday practices and relationships. Partition consequently operates simultaneously as a geopolitical process and as a transformation of the spaces through which individuals experience identity, security, and belonging.

The analytical sequence developed throughout this article can be summarized as:

Territorial Division → Communal Bordering → Social Exclusion → Displacement → Spatial Unbelonging → Counter-Space → Re-Belonging

The first transformation occurs at the level of territorial division. The political division of Bengal establishes new geographical distinctions, but Independence demonstrates that the consequences of this division cannot be contained within cartographic boundaries. Once political identities become attached to territory, communal distinctions begin to reshape everyday relationships. Neighbours who previously interacted through familiarity become identified according to religious categories; marketplaces become spaces of suspicion; households become sites where belonging can be granted or withdrawn; and villages become increasingly marked by communal difference. The border consequently acquires a social existence beyond its geographical location.

The second transformation is therefore communal bordering. Bordering in the novel operates through ordinary social practices rather than exclusively through formal territorial mechanisms. Religious identification, familial expectations, marriage, interpersonal suspicion, and exclusion contribute to the production of social boundaries. This process demonstrates that the border is not merely something imposed upon communities by the state. It is also reproduced through everyday interactions. The social

environment begins to function as though the territorial division has already occurred, producing what this article has described as "bordering before the border."

Communal bordering subsequently produces social exclusion. Deepa's experience is particularly significant because her relationship with Raza challenges the assumption that religious identity should determine the boundaries of interpersonal belonging. The rejection she encounters demonstrates how political and communal categories penetrate domestic relationships. Similarly, the transformation of ordinary neighbours into representatives of religious communities illustrates how individual identities become subordinated to collective categorization. The movement from "neighbour to enemy" therefore represents a transformation of social space rather than simply a change in personal attitudes.

Social exclusion, in turn, produces displacement. Importantly, displacement in Independence cannot be understood exclusively as physical movement across a national border. Displacement may begin within the household or community before geographical movement occurs. Deepa's expulsion from domestic space illustrates familial displacement; communal hostility produces social displacement; and Partition subsequently produces geographical displacement. The novel therefore expands the meaning of displacement from movement between territories to the broader experience of losing one's recognized position within familiar spaces.

This process culminates in what the present study defines as spatial unbelonging. Spatial unbelonging emerges when geographical presence, social recognition, cultural continuity, and affective attachment no longer coincide. A person may inhabit a particular location while no longer feeling recognized within it. Conversely, a lost homeland may remain emotionally and culturally meaningful despite physical separation. The condition is therefore characterized by a rupture between place and belonging.

Yet Independence does not conclude with displacement and loss. The narrative also demonstrates the capacity of individuals to construct counter-spaces. Counter-spaces emerge when characters develop alternative locations or relationships through which belonging can be reconstructed. These spaces do not necessarily reproduce the original home; instead, they provide new foundations for identity and participation.

For Priya, professional identity becomes a counter-space. Her movement from domestic restriction into medical education and professional practice provides access to a public sphere from which women have historically been excluded. Her medical career therefore transforms professional space into a site of agency, service, and civic participation.

For Deepa, interpersonal and cross-communal relationships constitute the principal counter-space. Her relationship with Raza challenges the communal organization of social space by creating a relational environment that cannot be reduced to a rigid Hindu/Muslim binary. Her intimate relationship consequently becomes a form of spatial transgression.

For Jamini, family, memory, and cultural continuity become mechanisms of re-belonging after the destruction of physical domestic space. Her experience demonstrates that the destruction of a house does not necessarily entail the destruction of home in its relational sense. Belonging can be reconstructed through relationships and cultural practices even when the original physical environment has disappeared.

The resulting movement can therefore be expressed as:

Division → Displacement → Reconstruction

This movement is important because it prevents the spatial reading from reproducing a purely victim-centred interpretation of Partition. Violence and displacement remain fundamental to the narrative, but the characters are not represented exclusively through loss. Their ability to construct professional, interpersonal, cultural, and familial counter-spaces introduces agency into the geography of Partition.

The argument also complements recent studies that moves beyond an event-centred understanding of Partition. Shoma (2022), for instance, emphasizes the interconnectedness of 1947 and 1971, demonstrating the importance of examining Partition through longer historical trajectories rather than treating 1947 as an isolated rupture. Clini et al. (2024), similarly, emphasize the continuing circulation of inherited Partition memories and their significance for contemporary identity and belonging. These approaches support the present article's understanding of Partition as a process whose spatial and affective consequences continue beyond the moment of territorial division.

The spatial reading developed here consequently adds another dimension to existing feminist, trauma, postcolonial, and memory-oriented interpretations of Independence. Rather than replacing these approaches, spatial analysis connects them. Gender becomes spatial when women are restricted to particular locations; trauma becomes spatial when violence transforms homes and villages into sites of fear; memory becomes spatial when lost places are reconstructed through recollection; and belonging

becomes spatial when individuals negotiate their relationship with home and community.

The title Independence consequently acquires a broader significance when examined through spatiality. At the political level, independence establishes a sovereign nation. At the individual level, however, independence requires the ability to occupy and participate in spaces of agency. At the cultural level, independence involves the preservation of memory and practices that maintain continuity with the past. At the affective level, independence requires the reconstruction of meaningful belonging after rupture.

The distinction can therefore be formulated as follows:

Dimension	Meaning of Independence
Political	Independence of territory
Spatial	Access to spaces of agency
Cultural	Preservation of memory and cultural continuity
Affective	Reconstruction of belonging
Personal	Capacity to determine one's relationship with home, community, and public life

The novel consequently invites readers to distinguish between the independence of territory and the independence of the person. Political independence may establish a nation-state, but it does not automatically guarantee freedom, belonging, or spatial agency for all individuals. The experiences of Priya, Deepa, and Jamini demonstrate that independence must also be understood through the ability to negotiate domestic, professional, communal, cultural, and affective spaces.

Ultimately, Independence presents Partition as a paradoxical process. It creates political boundaries while disrupting intimate boundaries; it produces new territories while destabilizing established homes; and it generates exclusion while also stimulating the reconstruction of alternative forms of belonging. The novel therefore moves beyond a representation of Partition as territorial division toward a more complex understanding of space as something politically produced, socially contested, emotionally experienced, and continually reconstructed. The concept of the Spatiality of Unbelonging captures this process by demonstrating how the destruction of established relationships between people and place can generate displacement and alienation, while memory, relationships, professional identity, cultural practice, and family can create counter-spaces through which belonging is rebuilt.

XXI. CONCLUSION

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Independence presents the Bengal Partition not merely as a historical division of territory but as a profound transformation of lived space and belonging. The novel demonstrates how political boundary-making enters everyday life, transforming homes, villages, marketplaces, relationships, and bodies into contested spaces.

The study argues that Partition operates as spatial violence, producing displacement and a condition of spatial unbelonging when geographical, social, cultural, and affective connections with home are disrupted. Priya, Deepa, and Jamini represent different responses to this rupture: Priya reconstructs agency through professional and public space, Deepa challenges communal boundaries through cross-religious relationships, and Jamini rebuilds belonging through family, memory, and cultural continuity.

The study therefore proposes the concept of Spatiality of Unbelonging, demonstrating that displacement involves more than physical movement; it involves the loss and transformation of the relationships that make a place meaningful. At the same time, Independence resists a purely tragic understanding of Partition by showing how memory, relationships, professional identity, and cultural practices create counter-spaces of re-belonging.

Thus, the novel's spatial trajectory can be summarized as:

Home → Bordering → Spatial Violence → Displacement → Unbelonging → Re-Belonging

Ultimately, Independence demonstrates that the enduring violence of Partition lay not only in separating people from territories but also in transforming familiar spaces into places of fear, exclusion, and uncertainty. Divakaruni's novel consequently contributes to Bengal Partition Studies and Global Partition Studies by showing that borders are not simply lines on maps; they reshape the spaces in which people live, remember, identify, and belong.

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