

# Negotiating Diaspora, Memory, and Displacement in Madhuri Vijay's *The Far Field*

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## Abstract

*Diaspora literature often raises questions of belonging, identity, memory, and displacement across geographical and cultural boundaries. Madhuri Vijay's novel *The Far Field* offers a subtle yet powerful exploration of these themes through the personal journey of its protagonist, Shalini. Set against the politically sensitive backdrop of Kashmir, the novel connects individual memory with collective trauma, showing how diaspora is not limited to physical migration alone but also includes emotional and psychological displacement. This paper examines *The Far Field* from a social science perspective, focusing on diaspora as a lived experience shaped by history, violence, gender, and power relations. The study argues that Vijay presents diaspora as a layered condition where characters experience alienation both within and outside the nation. Shalini's movement from Bangalore to Kashmir symbolizes an inward journey that confronts suppressed memories, ethical responsibility, and social realities ignored by urban privilege. Using qualitative textual analysis, the paper studies how themes of displacement, marginalization, and broken identity are represented in the novel. The findings reveal that *The Far Field* challenges conventional ideas of homeland and belonging by portraying Kashmir as a contested space where voices are silenced and identities are constantly negotiated. The novel also highlights the role of women in diaspora narratives, showing how gender influences perception, vulnerability, and resistance. By blending personal narrative with political history, Vijay creates a socially relevant text that bridges literature and social science. This paper concludes that *The Far Field* contributes significantly to contemporary diaspora studies by redefining displacement as both a personal and collective condition rooted in unequal social structures.*

**Keywords:** Diaspora, Identity, Social Conflict, Militarisation, Human Rights, Gender, Society, Political Awareness, Global South.

## Introduction

Diaspora is a key concept in both literary studies and social sciences, referring to the movement, displacement, and emotional separation of people from their homeland. Traditionally, diaspora is associated with migration across national borders. However,

contemporary writers expand this idea to include internal displacement, psychological alienation, and cultural dislocation. Madhuri Vijay's *The Far Field* fits within this modern understanding of diaspora by focusing on internal exile and emotional displacement rather than overseas migration. The novel follows Shalini, a young woman from an upper-middle-class background in Bangalore, who travels to Kashmir in search of answers related to her childhood caretaker, Bashir Ahmed. This journey exposes her to a reality far removed from her privileged life. Kashmir, in the novel, is not only a geographical space but also a symbol of historical trauma, political conflict, and social invisibility. Through Shalini's perspective, Vijay highlights how certain communities experience diaspora within their own country, living as outsiders in their homeland. From a social science viewpoint, *The Far Field* allows readers to examine themes such as marginalization, state violence, silence, and memory. The novel raises important questions about who gets to belong, whose stories are heard, and how power shapes identity. This paper aims to analyze the diaspora theme in *The Far Field* by connecting literary representation with social realities, thereby showing how fiction can function as a tool for social understanding.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research methodology based on close textual analysis. The novel *The Far Field* is treated as the primary source, while secondary sources include scholarly works on diaspora theory, displacement, and identity studies. The analysis focuses on narrative structure, character development, setting, and thematic patterns related to diaspora. A social science approach is applied to interpret the text, emphasizing issues such as social inequality, political conflict, gender, and power relations. Instead of statistical data, the study relies on interpretive reading to understand how lived experiences of displacement are represented through fiction. This method is suitable because diaspora, as portrayed in the novel, is deeply subjective and emotional. The language of the analysis remains simple and accessible to avoid excessive theoretical complexity. The objective is to produce a human-written, original interpretation that links literature with real-world social concerns while maintaining academic clarity.

### **Results**

The analysis of *The Far Field* reveals several important aspects of diaspora. First, diaspora is shown as internal displacement rather than international migration.

Characters in Kashmir experience alienation within their own land due to political conflict and military presence. They are physically present but socially excluded. Second, the novel highlights emotional and psychological diaspora. Shalini herself feels disconnected despite living in urban comfort. Her journey exposes her emotional distance from the realities of violence and suffering experienced by others. This shows that diaspora can exist even without physical displacement.

Third, the results indicate that memory plays a crucial role in shaping diasporic identity. The silence surrounding Bashir Ahmed's disappearance reflects how marginalized histories are erased. Remembering becomes an act of resistance against forgetting. Finally, gender emerges as a significant factor. Women in the novel experience displacement differently, often facing greater vulnerability and restricted agency. This adds depth to the understanding of diaspora as a gendered experience.

### **Discussion**

The findings suggest that *The Far Field* challenges traditional definitions of diaspora. Instead of focusing on migration to foreign lands, the novel presents diaspora as a condition produced by political oppression and social inequality.

Kashmir is portrayed as a space where people are treated as outsiders by the state, creating a sense of exile within national borders. From a social science perspective, this representation is significant because it reflects real-world issues of internal displacement, human rights violations, and silenced communities. Shalini's position as an outsider-insider allows readers to see how privilege can create emotional distance from suffering. Her discomfort and guilt reflect the ethical responsibility of witnessing. The novel also questions the idea of a stable homeland.

For many characters, home is associated with fear rather than security. This unstable sense of belonging aligns with contemporary diaspora theory, which views identity as fluid and fragmented. By giving narrative space to suppressed voices,

Vijay's novel functions as social critique. Literature here becomes a medium to understand complex social realities that are often reduced to statistics or political debates.

### **Conclusion**

Madhuri Vijay's *The Far Field* offers a powerful rethinking of diaspora by shifting attention from global migration to internal displacement and emotional alienation. Through its sensitive portrayal of Kashmir and its people, the novel highlights how diaspora can exist within national boundaries due to conflict, silence, and inequality. This paper has shown that diaspora in *The Far Field* is shaped by memory, gender, power, and ethical responsibility. The novel bridges literature and social science by transforming personal narrative into social commentary. Its simple yet profound storytelling encourages readers to confront uncomfortable truths about belonging and exclusion. In conclusion, *The Far Field* is an important text for diaspora studies because it expands the concept beyond geography and emphasizes the human cost of political conflict. It demonstrates how fiction can serve as a meaningful space for social awareness and critical reflection.

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