

Personal Conflict, Trauma, Mother and Daughter relationship in Madhuri Vijay's *The Far Field*

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ABSTRACT

Madhuri Vijay's first novel, The Far Field, provides a captivating examination of identity, sorrow in modern India. Located between Bangalore and the vast area of Kashmir, the novel traces the emotional and physical experiences of Shalini, a young lady facing the death of her mother. This paper analyzes The Far Field through a socio-political and literary perspective. It centres on significant motifs like emotional solitude, the quest for self-discovery, the emotional effects of unresolved sorrow, and the intricate representation of the Kashmir dispute. The book highlights the significance of compassion, introspection, and moral accountability in a broken world. The Far Field ultimately functions as both a heartfelt maturation narrative and a strong contemplation on the toll of apathy in the presence of political injustice.

Keywords: Political Conflict, Identity, Displacement, Trauma

Political identity serves as a vital component in *The Far Field* by Madhuri Vijay. The book demonstrates how politics and violence affect the everyday lives of ordinary people in Kashmir. Shalini, the main character, begins her journey for personal reasons, but upon reaching Kashmir, she realizes that the region is filled with silence, fear, and pain caused by years of ongoing conflict. For her, the conflict was just information she absorbed, while in Kashmir it was a routine reality. The reader observes the impact of political conflict on people's households, families, and discussions from her viewpoint.

In the villages, Shalini notices the prominent presence of the Indian army. Many villagers have lost their loved ones, others have disappeared, and no one knows where they are. Bashir Ahmed, previously close to Shalini and her mother, also disappears, becoming a symbol of Kashmir's anguish. Shalini begins to understand that for these people, conflict is not remote but affects every facet of existence. The book demonstrates how political strife erodes trust between people. Shalini notices that people find it difficult to communicate their thoughts freely. They select their phrases with caution because they worry that someone might be listening in. This silence signifies fear. Families cannot find peace as they live in constant fear of assaults or unanticipated acts of violence. Amina and her son Riyaz, who

welcome Shalini, also hold this fear inside them. Shalini realizes that even simple gestures of kindness are shaped by the political environment.

The story also illustrates the link between individual life and political life. Shalini's private grief over her mother is linked to the pain of Kashmiri families who have suffered losses in the conflict. Shalini feels loneliness from her private grief, whereas the individuals in Kashmir bear a collective sadness that is amplified by its political and historical origins. This helps her understand that her journey encompasses not only her personal experiences but also the wider setting of the environment she has stepped into.

The Far Field emphasizes the personal dimension of political strife through Bashir Ahmed, Amina, and Riyaz. They are not fighters, but common people who strive to live with honour. Nonetheless, they are forced to remain in a condition of uncertainty and constant worry. This makes us reflect on the unfairness of innocent people carrying the brunt of political disputes. Their silence and suffering echo stronger than any political speech. The book demonstrates that political conflict encompasses more than merely governments and borders; it impacts ordinary people whose lives are broken by it. Shalini's experience demonstrates how silence, suspicion, and grief permeate daily life in Kashmir. Madhuri Vijay may not offer solutions, but she reveals the deep impact of fear and violence on the reader.

Trauma is an intense emotional injury that occurs when an individual experiences an event too shocking to manage. It involves not just bodily harm, but primarily the mind and feelings. Trauma frequently arises from events such as death, violence, abuse, loss, or struggle. It is an experience that runs in the mind and continues to impact an individual even after it has concluded. Individuals who experience trauma might endure feelings of sadness, fear, guilt, anger, or confusion for an extended period. At times, they struggle to communicate their emotions, and the trauma remains quietly within them. It can cause individuals to feel disconnected from others and even from themselves, as the burden of pain is too great to reveal.

Trauma appears as an important theme to depict how individuals and societies carry the marks of history. Novels, poems, and plays often portray trauma, broken families, silence, fragmented memories, and struggles for self-identity. Trauma in literature isn't solely communicated through explicit violence; it can also be represented through omissions, silences, or the difficulties characters face in expressing their experiences. This makes trauma an important subject as it connects personal experiences to wider stories of war, colonization, and conflict. Many modern and postcolonial writers use trauma to depict how societies remember pain and how individuals carry invisible injuries. Balaev, M. "The Nature of

Trauma in American novels” states, “Trauma is portrayed as having the ability to permeate subsequent generations.”

In *The Far Field*, Madhuri Vijay presents trauma not merely as an individual psychological experience but as a collective historical condition shaped by the prolonged political conflict in Kashmir. Rather than focusing solely on Shalini's personal grief, the novel gradually shifts the reader's attention to the larger suffering of Kashmiri families who continue to live under violence, surveillance, and loss. Through characters such as Amina and Riyaz, Vijay demonstrates that trauma extends beyond physical violence into emotional and cultural memory. The recurring disappearances, military presence, and constant fear create what Cathy Caruth describes as trauma's “belated” nature, where painful experiences continue to return and shape the present (4). As Shalini travels through Kashmir, she realizes that her own bereavement is only one fragment of a much larger landscape of suffering. Vijay captures this emotional awakening when she observes that grief had become the language of the valley. The novel therefore transforms trauma from a private emotion into a shared political experience that affects an entire community across generations.

Silence functions as one of the novel's most significant representations of trauma. The inability of Kashmiri civilians to narrate their experiences reflects both fear and emotional exhaustion. Their silence is not a sign of forgetting but of memories too painful to articulate. This political silence mirrors the emotional silence within Shalini's own family. Her relationship with her mother is marked by unspoken emotions, hidden histories, and unanswered questions. As Shalini admits that there were things she had never asked her, things she had never told her. This parallel suggests that silence itself becomes a form of inherited trauma, connecting personal memory with collective history. From a trauma-theoretical perspective, silence becomes a testimony of suffering that language alone cannot adequately express. Vijay thus challenges conventional narratives by showing that what remains unsaid often carries greater emotional weight than spoken words.

The mother–daughter relationship forms the emotional centre of the novel and motivates Shalini's journey. Although her mother appears emotionally distant, her influence continues to shape Shalini's identity long after her death. Their relationship is characterized by affection complicated by emotional restraint, misunderstanding, and regret. Instead of portraying motherhood through sentimental ideals, Vijay presents it as emotionally fragmented and psychologically complex. Shalini's search for Bashir Ahmed is therefore not simply an investigation into her mother's past but an attempt to reconstruct her own fragmented identity. Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory helps explain this

relationship, as Shalini inherits emotional wounds and unanswered questions that were never directly communicated but continue to shape her life (5). Her journey becomes an effort to recover both her mother's hidden history and her own sense of self.

Critically, *The Far Field* suggests that trauma is transmitted across generations through memory, silence, and emotional absence rather than through direct experience alone. The novel resists offering political resolutions or emotional closure. Instead, Vijay portrays healing as an ongoing process of witnessing, remembering, and acknowledging loss. Shalini ultimately recognizes that her mother's imperfections do not diminish her love; rather, they reveal the complexity of human relationships shaped by grief and silence. By interweaving personal mourning with Kashmir's political history, Vijay demonstrates that individual identity cannot be separated from historical violence. Trauma, therefore, becomes both a personal inheritance and a collective social reality. The novel invites readers to recognize that memory, silence, and loss are not merely themes but ethical responsibilities, urging them to bear witness to stories that history often attempts to erase.

The relationship between Shalini and her mother in Madhuri Vijay's *The Far Field* is characterized by emotional ambiguity, silence, and psychological distance rather than conventional maternal warmth. Vijay deliberately departs from the idealized image of motherhood by portraying Shalini's mother as enigmatic, emotionally reserved, and unpredictable. Although Shalini remains deeply attached to her mother, she also experiences emotional insecurity because her mother's affection is rarely expressed openly. This paradoxical relationship illustrates what Marianne Hirsch identifies as the transmission of emotional memory across generations, where "postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth" (5). Even after her mother's death, Shalini continues to live under the influence of her mother's unresolved emotions, demonstrating that maternal absence can shape identity as profoundly as maternal presence. As Shalini reflects, "I had spent my life trying to understand her," suggesting that memory becomes an ongoing process of emotional reconstruction rather than nostalgic remembrance.

The death of Shalini's mother functions as the novel's central psychological catalyst. Instead of providing emotional closure, bereavement intensifies Shalini's search for meaning and compels her to revisit fragmented childhood memories. These recollections gradually reveal that her mother's emotional distance originated not from a lack of love but from her own unspoken suffering. Cathy Caruth argues that trauma is "not locatable in the simple violent or original event but in the way that its very unassimilated nature returns to haunt the

survivor later on” (4). This theoretical insight illuminates Shalini’s experience, as her mother’s emotional wounds continue to influence her long after death. Vijay therefore presents grief not as an isolated emotional response but as an inherited psychological condition that transforms memory into a site of continuous interpretation.

Silence emerges as the defining feature of the mother–daughter relationship and functions as both an emotional and narrative strategy. Shalini’s mother rarely explains her thoughts, motivations, or emotional conflicts, leaving significant gaps in her daughter’s understanding. The mysterious relationship between her mother and Bashir Ahmed remains one such unresolved absence that ultimately motivates Shalini’s journey to Kashmir. As Shalini admits, “there were questions I had never asked, answers I had never received.” These omissions are not narrative weaknesses but deliberate representations of trauma’s resistance to language. Dori Laub observes that traumatic experiences often remain “an event without a witness”, making silence itself a powerful form of testimony (75). Vijay employs this silence to demonstrate that emotional truths are frequently communicated through absence, secrecy, and incompleteness rather than explicit confession.

Despite the emotional distance that separates them, the relationship between Shalini and her mother remains fundamentally rooted in love. Their affection is expressed less through verbal intimacy than through memory, longing, and emotional persistence. Following her mother’s death, Shalini’s search for Bashir Ahmed becomes more than a physical journey; it becomes an attempt to recover fragments of her mother’s hidden life and to reconstruct her own fractured identity. This search reflects Hirsch’s concept of postmemory, where inherited emotions become central to one’s sense of self despite the absence of direct experience. Through this process, Shalini gradually recognizes that her mother was neither emotionally detached nor emotionally complete but an individual burdened by private struggles that she could never fully articulate. Vijay thereby rejects simplistic representations of motherhood and instead portrays maternal identity as historically, emotionally, and psychologically complex.

More broadly, the mother–daughter relationship symbolizes the difficulty of communication across generations. Emotional inheritance in *The Far Field* occurs not only through spoken narratives but also through silence, memory, and unresolved grief. Shalini ultimately comes to accept her mother not as an idealized parent but as a flawed human being shaped by vulnerability and emotional conflict. This recognition represents her emotional maturity and suggests that understanding often emerges through empathy rather than certainty. By intertwining personal memory with psychological trauma, Vijay demonstrates

that familial relationships are inevitably marked by contradictions, where love coexists with distance, and remembrance becomes an ethical act of witnessing. The novel ultimately argues that the complexities of maternal love cannot be measured through emotional expression alone but through the enduring influence that memory continues to exert upon identity.

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