

# Voices of the Marginalized: Exploring Subaltern Perspectives in Madhuri Vijay's The Far Field

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### Abstract

Madhuri Vijay's *The Far Field* (2019) follows the lives of marginalised Kashmiri civilians caught in the war-torn region. The novel centers on Shalini, who learns about her mother's past while witnessing the abuses of the innocent locals, many of whom are incorrectly viewed as militants. Through the lives of ordinary Kashmiris seeking justice and peace, Madhuri Vijay challenges stereotypes of the conflict. By following Shalini's narrative arc, the novel spotlights and emulates the non-consensual voices of a people subject to violence, allowing readers to interrogate the prevailing narratives surrounding Kashmir and its people. The narrative is an effort to fight against stereotypes — from the struggle of Kashmiris as participants of violence, the people of Kashmir are individuals dragged to violence, caught in violence. Her emphasis is on the silenced voices of people caught in the machinery of the state: the ordinary men and women who search amid the violence of a large-scale conflict for dignity and justice, for peace. Realistically portraying human stories is the focus of the novel, and it calls on the readers to rethink mainstream narratives and the layers of existence in Kashmir. In this paper, I read the novel through the framework of subaltern studies, emphasising how Madhuri Vijay amplifies the voices of those overlooked in broader political and social discourses.

**Keywords:** Kashmir, Subaltern Studies, Conflict, Marginalization, Stereotypes.

### Introduction

In politically volatile areas, hegemonic rhetoric tends to silence marginalized groups. Madhuri Vijay's *The Far Field* also does this, directing its focus, however, towards the forgotten lives of Kashmiri civilians caught in the crossfire of violence and stereotypes. This is another challenge to the dominant rhetoric. All along in the writing, the book records the sheer amount of suffering endured by those whose voices are silenced, yet manages to voice the intricacies of their plights. This essay explores how the writings of Madhuri Vijay lift those muffled voices and how it challenges the dominant discourse about the Kashmir. The heroine, Shalini, while traveling to Kashmir during the 90s encounters Riyaz and his family who appear to be innocent individuals desiring to live in peace.

Through their simple desires, they suffer from the stereotype that all Muslims in the region are militants. The book shows how such individuals, who do not believe in militancy and terrorism, are being

harassed and victimized. Riyaz and his family are but some of the Kashmiris whose passion for their country and nation has counted for nothing but suspicion and prejudice. In their narrative, The Far Field challenges destructive stereotypes and reveals the unfair hardships experienced by those trapped in a brutal strife and merely seeking to be accepted and in peace. In tracing the journey of Shalini, The Far Field probes the socio-political realities of Kashmir and challenges the mass stereotyping of its citizens. This research utilizes subaltern and postcolonial theoretical models to read the novel's depiction of identity, power, and resistance. Madhuri Vijay's account not only critiques the workings of systemic oppression but also calls for readers to re-imagine their understanding of Kashmir and its citizens.

## Materials and Methods

The current research of Madhuri Vijay's The Far Field is interpreted in terms of subaltern studies. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is a postcolonial studies theory, whose concept of the "subaltern" broadly speaks of the lives of oppressed and marginalized classes that are left out of dominant histories, politics, and social narratives. As Spivak outlines in her seminal essay, she explains the very concept of subalternity and the unfeasibility of being able to speak as the subaltern. The theory of the subaltern is approached indirectly in literature, especially in works that foreground the voices of those who have been relegated to the margins and the effects of colonial domination or institutionalized injustices.

Madhuri Vijay's novel, The Far Field, does a remarkable job of depicting the plight of Kashmiri civilians. It truly engages with subaltern theory by bringing to light the voices of those who are usually overlooked and suppressed in a conflict zone. Individuals such as Riyaz and his family are victims of systemic oppression and stereotypes that make their voices silent in overarching political and social discourses. The novel disapproves of the manner in which such persons are unfairly referred to as militants, whose complex identities are being reduced to one damaging stereotype.

## Findings and Results

### 1. Portrayal of Marginalized Voices

The novel captures the struggles of ordinary Kashmiri civilians, emphasizing their humanity amidst widespread stereotypes. A subedar's words to the local Kashmiri. This is what they thought of the marginalised people.

You Kashmiris' the subedar said. "There is something wrong with all of you, I swear. I think you're all sick. Somedays I think we should shoot the lot of you, save ourselves the trouble of dealing with your nonsense from now on. I'm telling you, old, young, man, woman, it doesn't matter. There is something wrong with every single one of you (FF 370)

The subedar generalizes the entire marginalised Kashmiri population, dehumanizing them by labeling them as "sick" and suggesting violent measures against them. The dialogue reflects the systematic oppression of Kashmiris, reducing them to mere targets in the conflict, and reveals how they are viewed as less than human. This mirrors the process of marginalization where groups are stripped of individuality.

### 2. Critique of Stereotypes

The helplessness of the Kashmiri people, who are haunted by the memories of their past but are unable to escape them.

*The world outside is always going to misunderstand us,  
that's how it works, isn't it? People live in different worlds,  
worlds that are not even adjacent. (FF 183)*

The disconnect between the Kashmiri people and the outside world, particularly the way they are misunderstood by those who do not experience their suffering or conflict. This highlights the alienation and lack of empathy that leads to the perpetuation of stereotypes, with Kashmiris often being misrepresented as violent or dangerous without a true understanding of their complex, tragic reality. This line critiques the inability of outsiders to truly see the humanity and pain of marginalized groups.

### **3. Subaltern Theory**

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the "subaltern" is used to explore the silenced narratives of Kashmiri civilians, focusing on their marginalization and systemic oppression. In *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's foundational essay

*"The subaltern cannot speak." (Can the Subaltern Speak?)*

This statement is an echo of Spivak's argument that the subaltern, specifically in the context of colonized subjects and marginalized groups. Spivak's well-known statement refers to the larger theme of subaltern theory, which holds that the oppressed, especially the colonized people, cannot represent themselves fully within the power structures.

### **Discussion**

Madhuri Vijay's *The Far Field* wonderfully converges with subaltern theory by highlighting the normally marginalized voices of Kashmiri civilians. The novel critically examines the institutionalized oppression these communities face, placing their struggle for justice and acknowledgment in the limelight. From the experiences of Shalini, readers are shown a glimpse of the complex realities of life in war-torn Kashmir. Her transformation from a passive bystander to a sympathetic ally underscores the paramount importance of hearing and connecting with marginalized populations. The novel debunks dominant discourses and invites readers to reconsider their perceptions of Kashmir and Kashmiris.

### **Conclusion**

In *The Far Field*, Madhuri Vijay portrays the struggles of marginalized Kashmiris, exposing the harmful effects of stereotyping and systemic oppression. The subedar's dehumanizing words about the Kashmiri people reflect how they are affected by the conflict, lost their individuality and humanity. The novel highlights the oppression Kashmiris face from the outside world, which ranges from damaging stereotypes.

The findings highlight the need for a shift in perspective, urging empathy and understanding over simplistic generalizations. Only by recognizing the true humanity of marginalized Kashmiris, temporary reconciliation and work toward lasting peace in the region, breaking the cycle of misunderstanding and injustice.

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