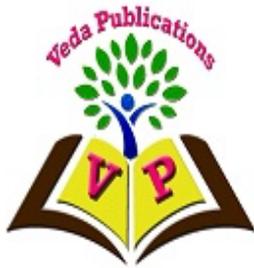




RESEARCH ARTICLE

**HOMES THAT WOUND: DOMESTIC SPACE, PATRIARCHY, AND SILENT VIOLENCE IN *HEART LAMP***

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This paper diagnosis how Banu Mushtaq's *Heart Lamp* exposes the hidden forms of oppression and exploitation faced by women within the socio-political and cultural framework of Indian society. The study foregrounds the domestic space as a critical site where patriarchal power operates subtly through silence, emotional neglect, and normalized violence rather than overt brutality. The study examines female characters in the narrative to reveal the complex realities of oppression, resistance, and identity shaped by patriarchal domestic spaces and how patriarchal ideology is internalised by both men and women, allowing silent violence to persist across generations. At the same time, the study resists a purely victim-centric reading. Through the character of Mehrun. Mushtaq introduces the possibility of women's agency and resistance, showing that even within oppressive structures, individuals can question authority and challenge entrenched norms. Thus, Mushtaq's narrative becomes a powerful commentary on domestic injustice, gendered silence, and the fragile yet persistent hope for transformation.

Keywords: *Patriarchy, Domestic Space, Women's Oppression, Silent Violence, Female Agency.*



INTRODUCTION

Banu Mushtaq is a Kanada language writer, lawyer, and an activist. She was born on 3rd April 1948 into a Muslim family in Hasan, Karnataka. She got international recognition for her collection of twelve short stories named *Heart Lamp* (2024), which was translated by Deepa Bhashti into English language. *Heart Lamp* received the International Booker Prize in 2025. In the history of Indian writing in English, three milestones were marked: Banu Mushtaq became the first Kannada-language woman writer to be nominated for the International Booker Prize; Deepa Bhashti emerged as the first Indian woman translator to win the award; and *Heart Lamp* became the first short-story collection ever to receive the prize.

Mushtaq was bold and rebellious from childhood, she defied community expectations by pursuing university education and marrying for love at the age of twenty-six. She has been involved in activist movements since 1980. Having supported the right of Muslim women enter into mosques and holy shrines, Mushtaq and her family were socially boycotted for three months in 2000, during that time, she received menacing telephone calls and a man attempted to stab her but was thwarted by her husband. She has also advocated the right of Muslim students to wear the hijab in schools and colleges, which has been challenged in Karnataka high court.

In *Heart Lamp* (2024), across its twelve stories collectively explore women's suffering, identity, and resistance within patriarchal and social structures. The first story *Stone Slabs for Shaista Mahal* exposes how society recognizes a woman's pain only after her death, the second story *Fire Rain* depicts the lasting trauma of communal violence on ordinary lives. The third story *Black Cobras* represents hidden social threats and suppressed violence, the fourth story *A Decision of the Heart* focuses on a woman's emotional struggle between personal desire and social duty. The fifth story *Red Lungi* critiques gender and class oppression through an everyday object that becomes a sign of power and humiliation. The sixth story *Heart Lamp* powerfully presents domestic space as a site of silent patriarchal control and emotional suffering. The seventh story *High-Heeled Shoe* reveals the illusion of modern freedom given to women, controlled by societal norms. The eighth story *Soft Whispers* highlights suppressed female voices. The ninth story *A Taste of Heaven* contrasts brief happiness with harsh reality. The tenth story *The Shroud* exposes poverty and social hypocrisy. The eleventh story *The Arabic Teacher and Gobi Manchuri* uses humour to address cultural identity conflicts. Finally, the twelfth story *Be a Woman Once, Oh Lord!* questions divine justice by foregrounding women's relentless suffering.



Having selected for my study the title story *Heart Lamp* under the light of radical feminist theory, which views domestic space (the home) as a primary site of women's oppression, where patriarchy operates through unpaid labour, control, silence, and emotional and physical violence. It strongly supports the idea that "the personal is political," (Hanisch, 1969). The protagonist Mehrun suffers to bear the reality of her husband's affair with another girl, which "offers a poignant, personal portrayal of postpartum depression, revealing the protagonist Mehrun's existential crisis and loss of self within a conservative context" (Kumar Singh Dharmendra: 2025).

She says, "Amma, don't I have something called a heart? Don't I have feelings? I cannot respect him as my husband when he has gone off like this. My body fills with disgust when I see him. Loving him is a very distant idea. It is not about him giving me talaq – I will get it from him. I will not go back to that house" (p.105). This passage reveals the patriarchal conditioning of society, reflected in her mother's response: "Meher, what are you saying? This is too much. He is a man; he has stepped in some slush, but he will wash it off and come back inside. No stain will stick to him." (p.105). Thus, in this way her mother made her to put silence. The stereotype sex roles perpetuated by both men and women in the society are repressive. One of the political feminists Kate Millett finds the

'sexual politics' is in the "acting out of the roles in the unequal relation of domination and subordination." (Millett: 1970)

Before Mehrun could respond, Amaan interrupted, criticizing her behaviour and suggesting that she must have spoken the same way to her husband, provoking his anger and departure. He then moderated his voice, mockingly implying that if the daughters-in-law of the family adopted such attitudes, it would be considered admirable. Mehrun's initial sadness swiftly turned into anger and finally settled into deep disappointment. She argued with her brother that she bought up good values and culture and she never followed things that brought dishonour to the family and she added of Aqirath (fear of Allah). She could not remove the burkha even her husband asked to do. "I would not even let my saree seragu slip from my head, didn't you? I feel naked if I remove it, now. You filled me with the fear of Allah. I did not agree to do what he asked me to, and so he took up with someone who dances to his tunes." (p.106)

Her brother Amaan cuts her words, ordering that they leave immediately for Chikmagalur to take her back to her husband's home. She refused going back and she argued that they were all afraid she would become a burden if her husband left her, which was why they kept asking her to endure the situation. She added that it was no longer possible for her to do so



and that, rather than continue suffering in that living hell, she would take her children and work as a labourer somewhere. She insisted that she would not be a burden on any of them at all. The statement starkly reveals the cruelty of patriarchy, where a woman's suffering is normalized and her independence is feared as a burden. Then her mother said, "Is the fruit a burden on the creeper, Meher? Do not talk nonsense." (p.106). she refused farther that she would not drink even a drop of water in her house and that she would not go to Chikmagalur, adding that if they took her there by force, she would set herself on fire. Having consoled by her mother that "The house that your dholi goes to should be the house from which your dhola comes out." (p.106)

Her brother said that such was the life of a decent woman and reminded her that she had a daughter studying in high school and two younger sisters of marriageable age. He warned that one wrong step could jeopardize their future and added that although she expected them to listen to her childish words and fight with her husband, they too had wives and children. He then told her to go inside and eat something and they must leave village. This statement clearly exposes patriarchal domination, where a woman is silenced through moral pressure, family honour, and social responsibility, forcing her to submit rather than assert her dignity. She sometimes took pride in

boasting about her elder brothers, and during moments of anger with her husband Inayat, she would threaten that they stood like lions behind her and would punish him if he continued his behaviour. That pride, however, had now been completely shattered. Her brothers' cruel words echoed in her mind as they declared that, had she truly cared about the family's honour, she should have set herself on fire and died, and that she should never have returned home. "If you had the sense to uphold our family honour, you would have set yourself on fire and died. You should not have come here." (p.107) As she entered the car, she did not turn back to look at her house.

Their journey continued in silence. She visualised that for sixteen years she had been nothing more than a pawn in Inayat's games of love and lust, and that after all those years he had insulted her womanhood. She recalled how he had mocked her by saying that she lay like a corpse and questioning what happiness he had ever gained from her. He had further taunted her by claiming that he had provided everything for her—clothes and food—and had arrogantly asserted that no one could stop him, as he was now with a woman who made him happy. The story is not solely one of despair; through moments of love and care, the protagonist, as a mother, discovers glimpses of hope and a renewed sense of purpose. "As a married woman with children whose dreams of



continuing her studies are stifled as she struggles against her family's patriarchal and traditional expectations." (J Pathania, Gaurav: 2025). As a result, she often feels that the lamp within her heart was extinguished long ago, leading her to soak herself in kerosene in a desperate attempt to end her life. "As evening started to lose its light, lamps were lit around the house. But the lamp in Mehrun's heart had been extinguished a long time ago. Who should she live for?" (p. 108). However, her daughter intervenes for the sake of the children. This cathartic moment reflects Kierkegaard's concept of despair as a necessary stage toward authentic selfhood, an agonizing yet transformative encounter with the self. Through this, Mushtaq illuminates mental health from an existential perspective, demonstrating how suffering can pave the way for self-discovery and the rekindling of one's inner light.

CONCLUSION

This study of *Heart Lamp* through the lens of radical feminist theory reveals how domestic space functions as a powerful site of patriarchal domination, where women's suffering is normalized and silenced in the name of family honour, morality, and social responsibility. Banu Mushtaq's portrayal of Mehrun powerfully validates Carol Hanisch's assertion that "*the personal is political*," as Mehrun's private anguish—her husband's infidelity, emotional neglect, and depression is repeatedly dismissed

as a personal weakness rather than acknowledged as systemic oppression. The home, instead of offering refuge, becomes a space where unpaid labour, obedience, and endurance are demanded, and where women are expected to sacrifice their emotional and physical well-being to preserve patriarchal stability.

Through the voices of Mehrun's mother and brothers, the narrative exposes how patriarchy is sustained not only by men but also by women who internalize and reproduce its values. The repeated insistence that Mehrun must "adjust," remain silent, and protect family honour demonstrates what Kate Millett identifies as *sexual politics*—the enactment of domination and subordination within everyday relationships. Mehrun's resistance, though repeatedly suppressed, marks a crucial assertion of female agency, especially when she refuses to return to a life of humiliation and declares her unwillingness to exist merely as a burden. Even though *Heart Lamp* does not end in absolute despair. While Mehrun reaches the brink of self-destruction, her daughter's intervention becomes a moment of emotional rupture and renewal. This turning point aligns with Kierkegaard's concept of despair as a transformative confrontation with the self, suggesting that suffering, though devastating, can also open pathways toward self-awareness and survival. Finally, Mushtaq illuminates the



intersections of patriarchy, mental health, and motherhood, offering a deeply humane narrative in which the extinguished lamp of the heart flickers back to life. *Heart Lamp* thus stands as a profound feminist critique of domestic patriarchy and a testament to women's resilience amid systemic injustice.

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