

**Silence as a Form of Resistance:
The Feminine in Banu Mushtaq's short story
collection Heart Lamp
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ABSTRACT:

Banu Mushtaq's Heart Lamp, a collection of short stories translated from Kannada by Deepa Bhasi, presents a profound investigation of Muslim women's lives in Karnataka, India. Heart Lamp is a translated work; it also belongs to the field of literature and translation studies. Translation allows these stories, rooted in local culture and idioms, to reach a broader audience, while also raising questions of voice, representation, and cultural transmission. Within translation studies, translated texts are not only reproductions but recreations that settle between the source culture and the target readership. This context makes Mushtaq's stories doubly significant: they reflect women's silences within patriarchal society and together highlight the translator's role in carrying these silences across languages. Thus, the paper positions its retelling of the stories at the intersection of feminist literary study and translation studies. This research paper investigates silence as a deliberate form of resistance, analyzing how Mushtaq's female characters employ it to challenge patriarchal, religious & socio-economic oppression. Using a feminist framework, including Judith Butler's Performativity. The study employs qualitative methods, close textual analysis & thematic coding to interpret the narratives. By redefining silence as empowerment, Mushtaq challenges stereotypes of Muslim women, offering a nuanced critique of gendered power dynamics. This study emphasizes the life changing capacity of silence in marginalized communities, supporting its recognition in global feminist discourse & regional

literary traditions.

KEYWORDS:

Silence, Resistance, patriarchy, oppression, Symbolic.

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Introduction:

Banu Mushtaq's Heart Lamp, the first Kannada work to win the International Booker prize, marks a notable landmark in Indian regional literature, containing twelve short stories written between 1990 & 2023 and translated by Deepa Bhasti, the collection shed light on the lives of Muslim women in Karnataka, a region shaped by complicated socio-cultural forces. Mushtaq, a lawyer, activist & writer aligned with the Bandaya literary movement. In each story one thing is common – how the young girl, the woman or old lady faces her everyday life – deferential & dependent on her male. We will feel for the female characters in each story. There is love, shame, anger, cruelty, pride & ego but again, the men who dominate these women are always powerful. Mushtaq's stories, rooted in lived experience, offer an insider's perspective on the intersections of gender, religion & class, making Heart Lamp a vital contribution to feminist literature. The concept of silence as resistance has been discussed widely in feminist theory, where silence is not always a lack of speech but rather a meaningful strategy. In Mushtaq's stories, silence frequently represents unspoken opposition, resilience, or memory. By choosing not to speak, the women in her stories often assert control over their narratives in ways that words may not approve. This scope is powerfully portrayed in The Stone Slabs for Shishta Mehal and the formal story Heart Lamp. Both stories foreground the feminine as a silent yet strong presence that resists oppression and asserts dignity. This paper first retells the stories in

detail before connecting them to the broader theme of silence as resistance.

About The stone slabs for shishta mehal:

The story begins by describing the Shishta Mahal, a once-proud palace built of heavy stone slabs. The Mahal, now crumbling, becomes the central metaphor. The slabs are strong, permanent, and silent—just like the women whose lives have been shaped within its walls.

The narrator reflects on how the Mahal, despite its fading grandeur, still preserves memories of the past. These memories are not just of kings, princes, and ceremonies, but most importantly, of women's silent struggles.

“Stone Slabs for Shaista Mahal”

Zeenat narrates this story, about her friend Shaista, whose marriage and domestic life are constrained by patriarchy. Shaista's husband Iftikhar expects her to lead the conventional life of wife + mother. When she has her 7th child, complications arise, Shaista dies, and he quickly takes another wife. Zeenat is shocked by how quickly life moves on, and by how women are replaceable in the eyes of men.

We are introduced to the women of the Mahal, though not individually by name. They are represented as a collective feminine presence. These women have lived lives bound by patriarchy: confined to private spaces, unable to speak their minds, and burdened with silence. Their voices have been erased, but their silence itself becomes meaningful.

The stone slabs of the Mahal stand as a witness to their pain, endurance, and resistance. Each slab seems to echo the weight of unspoken histories—stories of women who lived, suffered, and died

without their voices ever being recorded.

At the same time, the story suggests that this silence is not emptiness but fullness. It carries hidden power. The women's silence becomes their only form of resistance.

About The Heart Lamp:

Mehrun discovers her husband's affair. She returns to her parental home with her baby, asking for help. Her brothers, more concerned about family reputation than her suffering, send her back. At despair's edge, she pours kerosene on herself — ready to self-immolate — before being prevented by her child. The story draws from the author's own experience with postpartum depression. It shows how deep emotional suffering can be suppressed by social expectations, and how little support many women have in such circumstances.

The short story Heart Lamp is deeply symbolic and emotional, centering around the theme of feminine silence, sacrifice, and resilience.

The story begins with the image of a lamp burning inside a woman's heart. This lamp is not an ordinary one—it is a symbol of hope, stamina, and quiet strength. The lamp continues to burn even in darkness, supporting the woman through struggles that she cannot openly express.

The central character is a woman whose life is marked by silence. She has endured loss, neglect, and the weight of expectations. Instead of speaking out against her condition, she turns inward. Within her, the heart lamp becomes a guiding force. It enlightens her spirit even when the outer world is oppressive.

The woman's existence is shaped by patriarchal society—a world where her desires, dreams, and voice do not matter. She is

expected to obey, to serve, and to remain silent. Outwardly, she obeys. But inwardly, she nurtures a secret strength symbolized by the lamp.

The Voices of Silence

1. Silence as Refusal

In the story, *The Stone Slabs for Shishta Mehal*, the protagonist is challenged with claims about her morality. Instead of responding, she remains silent, her eyes fixed on the cracks of the stone slabs beneath her. Mushtaq narrates: “She let their words fall and spread on the stone, but her lips did not part.” This silence is not submission but refusal—it troubles the male speakers who expect explanation or confession. By withholding words, the character disrupts systems that rely on confession and apology. Mushtaq’s narrative strategy of ending scenes suddenly, or shifting focus to symbolic objects such as lamps and thresholds, highlights silence as a deliberate refusal.

2. Silence as Testimony

In the symbolic story *Heart Lamp*, the central female figure tends to a small lamp every evening without explaining its significance. The narrator observes: “No one asked why she lit the lamp, and she never said. Yet, in the quiet flame, her sorrow spoke more than her tongue could have.” This daily act declares to her endurance and unspoken grief. Instead of verbalizing trauma, she engages in ritual practice that silently records memory and suffering. Such acts preserve dignity while resisting patriarchal demands for verbal confession.

3. Silence as Narrative Ethics

Mushtaq’s refusal to overexpose suffering through explicit narration is also an ethical gesture. In *The Stone Slabs for Shishta*

Mehal, when the character faces humiliation, the story closes not with her verbal defense but with the description of her hand resting strongly on the cold stone. The silence in the narrative forces readers to actively interpret the scene: the absence of speech becomes a demand for ethical engagement. By allowing silence, gaps, and material symbols to carry meaning, Mushtaq resists peeping utilisation of women's pain.

Conclusion:

Banu Mushtaq's Heart Lamp demonstrates how silence can function as resistance, testimony, and a means of creating feminist subjectivity. Through silence, women refuse patriarchal control, witness trauma without re-victimization, and shape out autonomous spaces for selfhood. Mushtaq's narrative technique itself enacts an ethics of silence, convincing readers to acknowledge what lies beyond words. The study concludes that Mushtaq's rendering of feminine silence contributes significantly to feminist literary aesthetics, showing that the unsaid can be as politically and ethically powerful as speech.

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The Authors have no conflict of interest to declare that they are relevant to the content of this article.

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