

## **Abstract**

### **Illuminating the Silence:**

#### **Gendered Voices and the Poetics of Resistance in Banu Mushtaq's *Heart Lamp***

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This project examines how Banu Mushtaq's short stories reimagines women's silence, domesticity, and inner life as forms of subtle resistance within patriarchal and communal structures. Drawing on feminist and subaltern perspectives, the study focuses on four stories - "Heart Lamp", "Be a Woman Once, Oh Lord", "The Shroud" and "The Arabic Teacher and Gobi Manchurian". This study establishes a theoretical framework, engaging with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's critique of the subaltern voice, Chandra Talpade Mohanty's notion of feminism without borders, and Elaine Showalter's notion of a "female aesthetic" and the three phases of women's writing, offering a lens to read Mushtaq's narrative strategies as expressions of women's conscience. The study argues that Mushtaq's narrative strategies constitutes poetics of resistance that challenges conventional representations of Muslim women. Heart Lamp illuminates the inner worlds of women whose quiet endurance and moral imagination become acts of empowerment.

**ILLUMINATING THE SILENCE: GENDERED VOICES AND THE POETICS OF  
RESISTANCE IN BANU MUSHTAQ'S *HEART LAMP***



*Project submitted to St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) in partial fulfillment of the  
requirement for the degree of BACHELOR OF ARTS in English Language and Literature*

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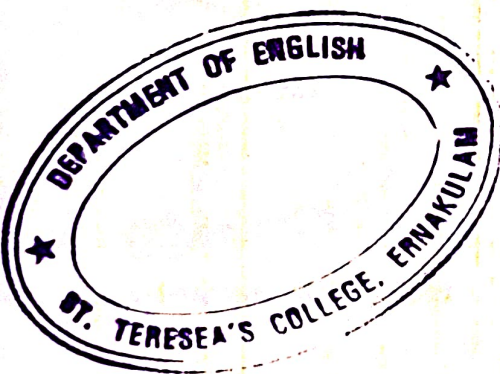
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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project titled “Illuminating the Silence: Gendered Voices and the Poetics of Resistance in Banu Mushtaq’s *Heart Lamp*” is the record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Ms. Lissy Jose, Assistant Professor, Department of English.

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## CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that this project entitled “Illuminating the Silence: Gendered Voices and the Poetics of Resistance in Banu Mushtaq’s *Heart Lamp*” by Sreya Mary P is a record of bona fide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

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## Introduction

In a patriarchal country like India, women are entitled to perform gendered roles, where they are meant to be passive and follow the normative structure of women being care-givers and nurturers. Women of minority communities are doubly marginalized. Their voices have no medium to reach the general public. Banu Mushtaq in her Booker Prize winning work *Heart lamp: Selected Stories* (2025) tries to bring forth the voices of women who are from the minority, the Muslim community, who lives in the highly patriarchal society of South India. Mushtaq is a writer, activist and lawyer from Karnataka which enabled her to witness the hardships of women from the minority communities and other diverse backgrounds. She was awarded multiple honors which include the PEN, Karnataka Sahitya Academy and Daana Chintamani Attimabbe awards. Her Booker Prize winning work comprises twelve short stories which is an eyeopener to the conditions women must face being doubly marginalized in a patriarchal society like India. Women who are able to make a difference in the society are shackled by the restraints of patriarchal norms and constraints in the idea of religion. Women who are initially seen as victims of silence in the stories later goes through the phase of covert protests and reforming the domestic sphere of household. This signifies domesticity to the venue of resistance, subtle rebellion, and a place of empowerment with their small yet meaningful action.

This project focuses on four stories selected from Banu Mushtaq's *Heart lamp: Selected Stories* - "Heart Lamp", "Be a Women Once, Oh Lord", "The Shroud" and "The Arabic Teacher and Gobi Manchurian". These stories articulate women's experiences of marginalization and their strategies of resistance, and to examine and identify the role of silence, speech and storytelling as gendered

forms of agency along with the narrative and stylistic techniques used by Mushtaq portrays and explores the foreground of women's interior world. The project also tries to examine how Banu Mushtaq represents women's silence and speech as acts of resistance. They are ways in which stories reimagine the domestic sphere as both oppression and empowerment and how the narrative strategies such as interior monologue, metaphor and imagery shape the feminist consciousness in the work.

The first chapter discusses the critical foundation of the study using feminist and subaltern theories putting light to the women's experiences of marginalization and resistance. The fundamental theorists whose theories are used for discussion include Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Elaine Showalter.

The second chapter talks about the application of the theories in the stories "Heart Lamp" and "Be a Woman Once, Oh Lord" and about the poetics of resistance devised in the story. The chapter shows how Mushtaq transforms silence, spirituality and emotions into a display of resistance. It shows how she builds an inner world through the agency of metaphors, prayers as an ideal space for introspection.

The third chapter deals with how domestic spheres are transformed from a space of confinement to a space of resistance, empowerment and rebellion. In the stories "The Shroud" and "The Arabic Teacher and Gobi Manchurian" portrays how being passive and latent leads to their fate for a long time leads them to be used as granted. After self-realization the characters try to reclaim the lost identity by reimagining the domestic roles, gestures and space.

## Chapter 1

### Feminist and Subaltern Perspective

The society, which is patriarchal in its nature, exhibits the mainstream while evading the marginalized sections of the society. In *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that silence is rooted in the society for the subaltern and marginalized sections as a result of structural inequalities ingrained due to the canonized sections (271-272). Spivak also points out that the marginalized are unheard (281-282). As a result, the extrusive mindset of the mainstream who forces silence through negligence. She points out that women are the key victims. In a patriarchal country the prevailing group who hold dominance and power are men. This is especially true when there are elderly men and thus females of the family are marginalised from decision making and other important aspects regarding their day-to-day lives. Spivak explains how the Marxist approach of understanding women and their basics undermines their individuality and therefore excluded from the mainstream, making them a subaltern figure (287-288).

Spivak in her work *Can the Subaltern Speak?* discusses the idea of epistemic violence where the minorities and marginalised are silenced by the dominant epistemologies which sabotages the alternative ways of perceiving the world. "It is well known that Foucault locates epistemic violence, a complete overhaul of the episteme, in the redefinition of sanity at the end of the European eighteenth century. But what if that particular redefinition was only a part of the narrative of history in Europe as well as in the colonies? What if the two projects

of epistemic overhaul worked as dislocated and unacknowledged parts of a vast two-handed engine?"(25) .The idea of how the dominant groups puts pressure on the minority is brought into light where the ideas of silencing, erasure and testimonial injustices play forefront on how the subaltern are treated. Hence the subaltern goes unnoticed by the dominant sections of the society. This is the root cause of their lack of representation. Their thoughts, words, actions, and movements pass on being unnoticed. The degree of lack of representation is very vast. They are forced to even give up their aesthetic representation. Their notions of feelings, thoughts, ideas, perspectives and any art forms which is used to propagate their individuality is forced to be shunned out of the canonized gazes. Hence never reach the masses which intern makes the subaltern stay in the shadows.

Women are doubly marginalised in the minority communities as they are in the subaltern category because of their identity of being a member of the minority. They are also marginalized because of their gender. Women, ruled over by the patriarchal norms lacks their power and presence. The idea she is from a minority undermines her very existence. Spivak in her work *Can the subaltern Speak?* states that even when a woman of a subaltern category speaks the structure of power translates her voice into intelligible terms for the dominant culture. Her actions are not hers alone and when unseen and her voice unheard, she is subjected to lack of identity (308).

India is a secular country with a vast diversity in regional and cultural differences, varied in their religious and social norms. It has a rich history with a prospering present. But the fact that it is a country which is male dominant society in most parts. The minority communities which include Dalits, Adivasis

and other religious groups like the Muslim, Sikh, Jains and others are recognized as subaltern and marginalised. Banu Mushtaq in her work *Heart Lamp: Selected Stories* projects the lives of Muslim women in the southern part of India, which has patriarchy and Hinduism as the canonized section of the society. The four stories which are considered for analysis revolves around the lives of women of the subaltern category. Their ideas of religion, patriarchy and the identity of woman bring forth the questions and answers to these characters. Their existence are treated like individuals who lack individuality, who are seen as replaceable and as figures who can be discarded. The voices of these characters are shaped by silence, faith and endurance. Mushtaq doesn't portray an overt resistance or protest in these stories by the female characters. Rather a silent movement built in resilience to change their fate by using silence as a key aspect. The stories can be seen as an expression of quiet, interior forms of self-expression. This intern can be viewed as subaltern speech where gestures of resistance are articulated through silence. Silence can be seen as a metaphor for the resilience and their weapon against their surrounding situations. Silence is the result of their emotions which are complex due to injustice they have faced. Mushtaq in these stories try to reclaim the individuality of these female characters. The narrative act put forward by Mushtaq in itself can be viewed as reclaiming personal space of these unheard women. All the stories are from a female point of view and are narrated by women who have undergone these experiences in their life. Thus making it means to portray that women who are considered worthless have their own thoughts, a mind of their own where they are their own individual being.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her work *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* states that feminism is a deeply

political act and she expresses her ideas of Decolonization, Anti-capitalist critique and politics of solidarity. The idea of decolonization which is driven by Phenom idealistic are evident in her work. She put forwards the idea that everywhere in the world women are considered inferior beings. May it be the developed first world countries or the third world countries, the idea of female viewpoints are considered irrelevant by the male intellectuals. It denies the female views forcing it to lay dormant (30-42). Mohanty in her work *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* states that “It would require a clear understanding that being a woman has political consequences in the world we live in; that there can be unjust and unfair effects on women depending on our economic and social marginality and/or privilege. It would require recognizing that sexism, racism, misogyny, and heterosexism underlie and fuel social and political institutions of rule and thus often lead to hatred of women and (supposedly justified) violence against women. The interwoven processes of sexism, racism, misogyny, and heterosexism are an integral part of our social fabric, wherever in the world we happen to be” (3). It can be seen that women of different backdrops are treated in the same manner where negligence and silence is the standard set for women by the society. “Here is a bare-bones description of my own feminist vision :this is a vision of the world that is pro-sex and-woman, a world where women and men are free to live creative lives, insecurity and with bodily health and integrity ,where they are free to choose whom they love ,and whom they setup house with, and whether they want to have or not have children ;a world where pleasure rather than just duty and drudgery determine our choices, where free and imaginative exploration of the mind is a fundamental right; a vision in which economic stability, ecological sustainability, racial equality, and

the redistribution of wealth form the material basis of people's well-being. Finally, my vision is one in which democratic and socialist practices and institutions provide the conditions for public participation and decision making for people regard less of economic and social location. In strategic terms, this vision entails putting in place antiracist feminist and democratic principles of participation and relationality, and it means working on many fronts, in many different kinds of collectivities in order to organize against repressive systems of rule. It also means being attentive to small as well as large struggles and processes that lead to radical change—not just working (or waiting) for a revolution” (Mohanty 3-4).

Mohanty tries to bridge the differences and view women oppression as a key which unites women of all countries across the globe. Women who are divided by borders, cultures, religious, ethnic and racial statuses are united in the aspects of femininity. Their lack of individuality pushes for self-reflexivity in collectivity. It makes these women to make their voices heard, their presence noticed and make the meagre roles into unavoidable parts of the society. The solidarity faced in the Othering gives a sense of collectivisation to these sections causing them to create a unified intellectual fort. The essentialist idealistic politics where the identity of a person is kept as a strategic point keeps the society enveloped in oppressor and oppressed idea (33-36). This can be said the main reason for forming this system of subaltern and marginalization. Mohanty's theory flashes light in understanding the gendered experiences within the society. "Connecting with Spivak's work also highlights the necessity for international feminist philosophy, which is mindful of the intricate networks of patriarchal power systems and context-specific linkages between gender and power"

(Mohanty 154). It is especially effective in a diverse society of India which is varied in its heritage of decades, loaded with people of diverse social background, religious practice, geographical factors and cultural norms.

In the stories taken for analysis, the female narrators are members who belong to a religious minority, the Muslim community. These women possess the female characteristics and viewpoints of the marginalized community. The theory of Mohanty suggests that these women narrators' actions can be justified. It is only because they were born and brought up in the harsh patriarchal society. They grew under the strict upbringing following their religious teachings. The acts which are commonly possessed by the female character which include nurturing, caring, forgiving, waiting and praying are only possessed because they were taught to endure. The lack of their individual self is their only way of resistance which is set up in the very system which constrains their actions. If it wasn't for the restraints and lack of awareness of the women to find their economic individuality. Most of the characters would most likely have presented overt resistance. But the shackles of the societal norms and culture restrain them from this causing them to resist in a covert manner. The domestic spheres become a field of negotiation revealing that everyday life is politically charged and transformative.

Another aspect which is drawn for analysis was inspired by Elaine Showalter who in her work *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* discusses the idea of Gynocriticism in order to establish an alternate critical canon of women's literature. She explores the lost women writers and their critical thoughts. The unheard or forgotten voices in the course of history and attempts to lay a foundation by compiling these feminist views. They

are untouched by male critical cannon which forces these ideas to be lost and swept under the rugs. Showalter expanded the idea of Virginia Woolf forward where it is discussed that a woman needs - a room of one's own. She also emphasises the idea that an extraordinary woman needs the assistance of an ordinary women to propagate and spread their thoughts. Applying this idea Showalter tries to find the women writers, Thinkers and works from the nineteenth century so that the foundational discourse of feminism is used as a key point for future references. Showalter brings forth the reasons for the characterized women's writing: awakening, suffering, unhappiness, and matrophobia, among others (25-40).

Showalter in her work enlightens writers of feminism with three phases that "establish[es] the continuity of the female tradition from decade to decade, rather than from Great Woman to Great Woman." (128) She explains how the first phase of female writing is closely associated with male pseudonyms and their style of writing imitated the male ideas and values as they considered the social restraints. "Women [writing] in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture... The distinguishing sign of this period is the male pseudonym... [which] exerts an irregular pressure on the narrative, affecting tone, diction, structure, and characterization" (Showalter 137). The following phase is called the Feminist phase which deals with "Amazon Utopias" which calls for female-led societies of the future. The highlighting point of this phase is that women started to deny their subordination and stated showing signs for individualism.

In *Toward a Feminist Poetics*, Showalter states that "women are historically enabled to reject the accommodating postures of femininity and to

use literature to dramatize the ordeals of wronged womanhood” (138). This phase saw women writers protesting against male standards and values, asking for female authority and autonomy along with propagating ideas of female independency. In the third phase women writers mostly overcome the shackles of male dominance expressing their views and thoughts in their own perspectives through their works. They are indifferent to the patriarchal and traditional norms set in the sphere of writing. Showalter says, “women reject both imitation and protest—two forms of dependency—and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature” (139). Thus, the three phases show how with time the deconstructivism has evolved leading to significant changes.

The female aesthetics has undergone massive changes within this period as the idea of female aesthetics evolved. The female aesthetic became a retreat for women, ironically away from themselves, their experiences as women, and even the material world. Elaine Showalter in her essay *Toward a Feminist Poetics* says that “the fiction of this generation seems oddly impersonal and renunciatory at the same time that it is openly and insistently female. The female aesthetic was to become another form of self-annihilation for women writers, rather than a way of self-realization” (140). The narratives of the period were rooted in women’s experiences, their emotional and mental thoughts and were associated with knowledge with one’s own body. Hence the works are closely associated with circular structure, empathy and symbolic language.

Banu Mushtaq in her work *Heart Lamp: Selected Stories* professes the idea of Female phase where she makes the female characters of the minority community to narrate the stories. It is through their perspectives ideas and

thoughts, the stories move forward, the narration is subjective in nature as they tell their emotional states, their personal views unlike the view of the male character who is also a witness to the same incident. The gynocentric approach where the author and all narrators are female emphasises the critical female view which is canonizing the third phase approach and is considered as a deviation from the male norms showing an autonomous women's writing tradition. Most of Mushtaq's works features aspects of metaphorical imagery of light and water, lyrical prose and focuses on the inner consciousness which in turn embodies female aesthetics which transforms communal insights which opens eyes of both the narrator and the readers.

## Chapter 2

### Poetics of Resistance - Voice, Silence and Inner freedom in “Heart Lamp” and “Be a Woman Once, Oh Lord”

“Heart Lamp” and “Be a Woman Once, Oh Lord” are stories which portrays a great significance in the collection of short stories. The narrator is oppressed and shackled by the norms of the society. Showing any signs of deviance is considered a greater sin which would result in social ostracization. Women are forced to be shunned from the opportunities to show their resistance overtly which intern marks them as the culprits who destroyed the peace and sanity of the community. Mushtaq through her setting of the stories shows how the society of India which is patriarchal in nature and is self-restraint to the minority Muslim community. The religious teachings of the group cripple the voices of women. According to the patriarchal system women are meant to be only caregivers, who lacks individuality, burdens who are meant to supply unpaid labour and ornaments and childbirth machines. Mushtaq puts forth the notion that women are not dolls, they have their own individuality, their own thoughts and question and answers they seek to understand themselves and their surroundings.

The story “Heart Lamp” revolves around the character Mehrun, who is a married women. She belongs to the household of a deep rooted patriarchal and Muslim family. The character is filled with the stereotypical women traits, where she is a silent voiceless wife, obedient to her husband and elders of the household. She is seen as a burden by her husband and family, and a typical woman who is endlessly accommodating of how she is treated. She faces

constant criticism and neglect by the other residents of the household, any signs of fatigue or protest is dismissed as laziness. This is an attempt to deviance and moral failure and lack of upbringing, shunning her chances to speak up for herself leading to mental breakdown and depression. She blames herself for the flaws that is shown by others and is filled with deep guilt and repressive helplessness adds to how women as a whole is treated in the harsh patriarchal and religiously oppressing systems. As the story progresses Mehrun who is completely dismantled of individual pride and who is emotionally broken down by how she is treated. The feeling that she is completely useless and weighed by despair, hopelessness and pain attempts to end her life believing that her existence has no value and that death may be the only escape from her pain. She pours kerosene over her in the midst of the night when her young daughter Salma carrying her baby sibling comes in search for her mother. The child cries to her mother to stop her actions. The cries of her children change her mind to end her life and makes her determined that she is not meant to pay for the sins her husband has committed. Her life choices are closely associated with her maiden family as they tells her “It seems like you have made up your mind to bring us dishonour” (91). The close association to the idea that a woman who is married of lady is always a stranger in the in-laws house along with the idea that they are also strangers to their own house. This is clearly stated in the story where it says “You are like my mother, and with those words had pushed her alive into hell. In the few months since he had uttered these words, every morsel of food she ate in that house felt like a sin. The feeling of being a stranger in her own house nagged at her, and the fire of insults ground her down, and so she had sought the help of her family” (Mushtaq 98).

“Be a Woman Once, Oh Lord” is a story where Mushtaq depicts the idea that patriarchy for their power dominance had given God male aspects. The narrator of the story is a Unnamed Muslim woman who is abandoned by her husband. She is peculiar in nature as she prays, she does not ask for favours but boldly questions the God for his actions. She repeatedly asks God to be a woman, at least once in order to understand the situation they are living in. She can be seen as representative of women who live in a harsh patriarchal society where the value of women are measured by not her own actions but the actions of her spouse. She is blamed and sunned from the society for being abandoned by her husband. She becomes the reason for moral subjugation for the action which are not hers. She is a typical woman who carries dishonour even if it’s no mistake of her own. She endures the injustices faced because of no mistake of her own while the society symbolises her as the reason of her fate when she is meant to be a victim.

She accuses God for being distant from women’s pain and asks why religious laws always demand patience, forgiveness, and endurance from women, while granting men freedom and authority. Driven by the weight of dishonour and pain of exclusion along with the fear and burden from the society she vents her emotional thoughts in prayers, but instead of the typical prayers asking for blessings and favours, she accuses the god and urges him to live the life of a woman who are scrutinized by the society even for mistakes she didn’t commit, to live in the constraints set up by the patriarchal society and to go forward in life losing oneself in the process to live it. The questions she asked are out of her sorrow, pain, humiliation faced and the deep scars which were caused by the society.

This can also be seen as a technique used by the author to question the patriarchal setup laid on in the society by various parts in the world where the origin of humanism is primarily based on the belief that human was made first. It was in resemblance to the creator of the world, God. The hidden hint that God is of male gender as the belief that man was created first brings in the idea that female body is inferior to male body. It entails the rights women could have, minimalizing their role and influence they have in the society. The idea of body politics Mushtaq portrays and questions, who said that God is of male gender. She puts forward the question by what means is women less favoured by God, when she is also a creation of God. The idea of gender politics in patriarchy and the religious communities restrains the female views and thoughts, shackling the very existence and ideas of female urge to express - to Speak and to be Heard.

In both the stories Banu Mushtaq tries to bring out the elements of silence and the voice aroused in the silence. She uses silence as a tool of resilience in the story "Heat Lamp". Mehrun's act of living even after enduring the pains of the experiences she has gone through is the absolute form of resistance and her silent approach to live. Even when driven to the brink of death by her circumstances draws out the idea of determination and a silent act to defy her fate which is forced upon her by the society. Mushtaq in her works shows how the epistemic violence plays a role to silence Mehrun and how the patriarchy acts as an epistemological figure which drives her into despair. Mehrun is silenced by her very own family when she asks for individuality and makes her tied to her children, to act submissive for the sake of role as mother. Spivak's question if the subaltern can really speak is put into play as the narrator who is a woman is marginalized when it's known that she may go against the established rules (271-

280). Her voice silenced, her actions of desperation overlooked as overreaction and her ideas completely falling in deaf ears. Forcing her into the inner circle of the house, Mushtaq creates the idea of inner household to be the cage which restricts women's actions while also driving the idea the reform should start within. The uses of symbols of fire and her attempt to burn herself signifies the inner fire which is forced to be repressed by her surrounding while the inner most feelings of anger and helplessness makes one to end their pathetic lives with the burning undermined wishes showing that women are capable of to destroy if they really wanted to and it is this factor that the society is trying to repress as they don't want real power to lie in the hands of women. Fire is also a symbol of renewal and can also be seen as a factor which leads to self-knowledge. It is through the idea of fire that Mehrun starts her silent revolution, her decision to live, to face life with her head held up high for she becomes self-aware that she is not to be blamed for any of the acts that she has undergone.

In the story "Be a Woman Once, Oh Lord" Mushtaq questions the idea that it is the women who are to be blamed for any mistakes even when it is the male activity which has wronged her. The narrator who tries to seek solace and calm through spiritual conversation ends up accusing the God, Religion and society for her condition. She asks why it was said by the god that women are meant to forgive and endure. She states the hardships she faced and the cruel reality she lived in which can be seen from "Laughter did not cross my lips, and neither did my eyes wander round like bees. This was why Amma did not keep a strict eye on me. Don't do this, don't do that, don't stand like this, don't look like that... she did not need to tell me such things. I did not have the habit of thinking of many things either" (180-181). This shows how the idea of Spivak is

propagated where the powerful silences the weak, the dominant ostracizing the minorities (271-280). It is seen that the control of the society has held her in the restraint area not allowing her to receive a chance to make her voice heard, marking her a symbol of subaltern victim. She questions and thinks about the narrative where God is a male figure and is urged to live the life of a women to understand her grievances she has to face to survive in the patriarchal society. Her act of turning to spiritual assistance puts forth the act of defiance and a wave of intellectual enlightenment to understand the idea of God is put forth.

Banu Mushtaq is a prodigious writer of Indian literature who primarily prevailed in literature in Kannada. The Kannada literature in its contemporary phase regards Mushtaq's work as assets, where one can explore prospects of feminism, along with subaltern identities along with the idea of propagated patriarchy. The collection of short stories entitled *Heart Lamp: Selected Stories* Mushtaq indicates that she has deep understanding of personal life of marginalised women in a marginalised religious community like the Muslim community and tries to show us how women are treated in the community along with being doubly marginalized for being women. The hardships each person goes through are different while the stories indicate that the hardships a woman is entitled to phase is harsher in a patriarchal society along with the subaltern identity hanging above their head.

Mushtaq uses the first person narrative style in the story which is filled with interior monologues which projects the idea of female phase of Showalter. The female ideas and thoughts are vividly present free from the male literary cannon and is subjected to female thoughts, views, actions and a more subjective approach to female body where women are not just objectified but rather

discussed in a much more subjective and humanistic approach (13). The idea of female aesthetics can be seen throughout the work as all the stories are the subjective views of the female characters. Gynocentric approach used by Mushtaq adds to the idea and style of the stories where male view is not considered. The fusing of lyrical language along with rhythm are used as tools by Mushtaq to fuse an effective method of storytelling. The above two stories when looked on together can be seen as site on how inner voice can be seen as resistance and form of rebellion. It becomes a site where emotional depth and poetic form merges to challenge the patriarchal silencing and thus igniting the idea that resilience and rebellion start with sheer determination and voices which are unheard, silence can also be seen as a voice of rebellion which is silent but can make the largest noise.

### Chapter 3

#### The Domestic Sphere and Acts of Transgression in “The Shroud” and “The Arabic Teacher and Gobi Manchurian”

In the story “The Shroud” Banu Mushtaq show us the life of two different women who comes from two different background. The first woman, the narrator Shaziya, a wealthy housewife who flaunts on her wealth which is brought in to the household by other members of the family while the other is the poor elderly cleaning woman named Yaseen Bua. The elderly woman had been part of the household doing domestic labour for years. Her wish was to have a Zamzam water soaked kafan (burial shroud) during her burial when she dies. Shaziya is meant to go for a pilgrimage and hearing this Yaseen Bua requests her to buy the shroud, the old lady even had saved money for years from her meagre salary to buy the shroud. She hands over the money and expected Shaziya to bring back the Shroud. Upon arrival Shaziya becomes enthusiastic for shopping and forgets her promise to buy the shroud. The materialistic aspect of human nature can be seen here as she blindly follows her urges to buy the materials she sees when she was meant to be in a Hajj and forgetting the promise to Bua can be seen as how the dominant section of the society tries to overexert their power on the poor and weakly, the subaltern section of the society. Upon arriving back, when she sees Yaseen Bua she remembers her request, but the act cannot be undone as they had already returned. Years later when Shaziya hears of the news of Yaseen bua’s death she is engulfed in guilt as she remembers the promise she had made and is filled in pain and regret as she thinks about the incident.

The second story “The Arabic Teacher and Gobi Manchurian” revolves around how the power of male dominance and religion affect the subaltern and marginalized, especially the narrator of the story. The gap between the true morals and the reality explains of how the society works by infusing fear and the idea of poser on the weaker sections to assert their dominance and to come into the current state “He always has God’s name on his lips. He is someone who advises people and solves problems for them” (Mushtaq 172). The story revolves around a nameless narrator and her experience in treating the Arabic teacher, who is a figure of power and authority in the religious world. His demand to have Gobi Manchurian for his meals shows how the power is abused by the powerful, a symbol of dominance, “his favourite gobi snack to be served at the wedding, and became a little worried about this Arabic teacher’s antics. I also felt a little sympathy. Wondering who could rid him of his obsession with gobi Manchurian” (175). The idea of public image to private image can be seen in this story where the appearance the teacher upholds in the public eyes is crumbled down by his actions in the private. The lack of religious reality in its case of religious authority is advocated through the story.

In the story, the teacher Hazrat after his marriage sees his wife as a tool for cooking his favorite dish Gobi Manchurian. She is just a tool or a maid for meeting his needs. Women are passivized of the other roles they are meant to play as an individual and is constrained to the inner walls of their household while imposing the idea of patriarchy along with imposing the role of caregivers and nurturers, thrusting their idea of womanhood to be shackles that bind them to their house, their kitchens. Even when the narrator herself is a career woman she is met to face disdain of her husband for not restricting herself from the society.

Even when her brother who stands along her life to support her overtly hides his disapproval to his sisters work when she gets late to return home from work. She is expected to serve them tea as it is considered to be the gendered role of women as the hostess of the family. Even the teacher is confused upon meeting her for the first time as she appears with her lawyer's coat. This was because women, especially of Muslim religion were not expected to be working and not especially as a lawyer which empowers them to break them free from the restraints of patriarchy and religion. The idea of Spivak can be seen in play here as the question, who can speak and be heard, is answered (281-283). The teacher is seen to be afraid of her when he is discovered of making the Gobi dish in the kitchen with her daughters. Also, it can be noticed that when the Maulvi goes about to search for a bride her client asks her opinion on the matter. Another instance is when her cook comes and asks about her opinion when the cook's niece's marriage comes in question. This shows how women influence the spheres of information and acts as an indispensable part of the society.

The narrator is concerned about the wife of the Teacher when the wife along with brother to ask to help file the case about her abuse from her husband. She finds it absurd and confusing about the Teacher's Gobi Manchurian addiction and abusing his wife over the name of a dish. It is seen that the narrator tries to figure out the recipe of the dish to help the wife of the teacher from being abused. This can be seen as an act where women become agents for propagating patriarchy as she wants to save the marriage, as she knows how the wife of the teacher will be scrutinized by the society if she divorced. This act makes it obvious that in a patriarchy women are meant to be the shadow of the man in their house.

The story “The Shroud” throws light in how Gayatri Spivak’s idea of resistance is seen when Yaseen Bua tries to make an approach to ask for the Zamzam water sprinkled shroud (308). It signifies a death which is enveloped in dignity even though her depended, oppressive life is embedded with lack of human dignity. She wishes that upon death she receives the dignity which was due to her while living. The act of not making trouble or accusing Shaziya or protesting outright. This shows how the oppressed lack a voice out the needs and what they have faced and injustices that they have gone through. There is a silence which is extremely loud which tells of her pain and disappointment she faces and the lack of expressing this shows how the third world women of the minority are treated by the mainstream, this aligns with Spivak’s idea that resistance can exist within the limits imposed on the subaltern (295-296). Yaseen Bua initially talks of how the shroud was important to her and gets a little angry and voices her inner sorrow in a convincing statement but the loss of power restrains her from saying or expressing her thoughts more. She left the place and never came to see Shaziya again even when Shaziya thought she would show up for Ramzan or Bakrid. Shaziya’s ethical failure can be seen in the story where the act of journey of repentance becomes an act of material world. Yaseen Bua, though powerless, emerges ethically superior. This reversal is a key form of resistance—the oppressed reveals the hollowness of privilege.

Chandra Mohanty’s idea of considering women as a universal group can be used in the story where Shaziya represents the universality of actions by the dominant sections of the society who silences and exerts the power of dominance on the minority (17-18). The idea of Universal women can be seen here as Yaseen Bua symbolizes the voiceless subaltern, the women who goes unheard when they

demand their needs, the negligence and existence make them invisible. The class hierarchy among women is seen in the story as the Yaseen Bua is oppressed through material negligence showing their agency does not matter while Shaziya holds power through the propagation of this material possessions. The story shows how class hierarchy among women can be as oppressive as patriarchy itself—an idea central to Mohanty's intersectional feminist critique (17-19). Mohanty's idea of elite women speaking for the subaltern women can be seen here as Shaziya who is a privileged women acts in her own will while Yaseen is meant to keep silence in the story (20-21). Using her voice would have led to distress in the household causing the person to even lose her job which makes the oppressor's tool to oppress in this situation and the story being narrated from her point of view adds to this idea where the women of inferior authority can be seen as negligible and unwanted still making the voice of the dominant to be heard while the marginalized goes unheard.

The idea of household becomes complex in these stories as the idea of home which is domestical prison to women becomes the ideal space for rebellion. They try to cross the boundaries in their own ways where they are expected to be silenced and held captive, living a life without socializing and how the silence drains them of their lives. The domestic idea of home is shown as a place for transgression, a place where personal reform and awareness happen. The patriarchal point in the society of household clutches is broken down covertly as they redefine the idea of space as a void which reconfigures self-definition and moral authority of women.

These stories show how Banu Mushtaq redefines and undermines the patriarchal narratives with the female writing and aesthetic writing canonizing the

idea of female literary cannon. The characters do not undergo a dramatic revolt or overt protests. The actions are taken in silence where, their sole determination in the minds of the characters where no one other than themselves know about their resolves through persistence, sympathy and small yet radical acts of choice of transgression. It can be noticed that both characters are socially constrained in one way or the other. This includes marriage, home, family, religious norms, patriarchal constraints forcing the female characters to be follow the norms and shackling them to be inferior to the male point of activity. Their thoughts limits their influence in society and dominant spheres of influences and opportunities.

Power exercised by women are limited and thus most of the female characters are portrayed as helpless and submissive to fate. The space where these stories take place is a home, which is not just a neutral place. It is a sphere where female roles are imposed and female roles are normalized and enforced, making the women to be economically depended on the males. This undermines the economic independence of the women along with their emotional stability as they feel incomplete and useless without their male counterparts.

The domestic space revolves around female obligations. Woman are expected to show emotions of pity, grief, sacrifice and other feeling making them emotionally vulnerable. This is the key aspect of subjectivity and passivity the society expects from women. The domestic sphere becomes a shackle on the female views and individuality. The household thus is a sphere of female oppression. Mushtaq reimagines the domestic sphere as a place where power, religion, gender and desire becomes a contested terrain. Mushtaq exposes how domination is practiced and quietly and imperfectly resisted.

Banu Mushtaq portrays threshold as a metaphor for transition, control and transgression. Women's lives are always at the threshold as they are not welcomed in both their maiden house and their in-law's house. A woman is always subjected to instability. They are said to be living on the threshold which means never belonging to either side. Mushtaq uses the idea of threshold as a metaphor for social regulation, moral ambiguity and subtle resistance. Women are denied freedom to society but here Mushtaq exploits the threshold instability to assert agency. It means oppression is not in confinement to households but to be kept in the threshold. Religion is subtle yet powerful as they appear as natural, humane and moral receptivity are part of personal sphere. In "The Shroud" the religious aspect of the shroud plays a vital role in the progression of the story. It is seen by Bua as a symbol of purity and spiritual freedom in death and salvation.

In "Arabic Teacher and Gobi Manchurian" religious authority is normalized. The teacher is seen as a person who teaches the words of God and thus treated with high respect. The narrator never raised a complaint when the teacher forced her daughters to make Gobi Manchurian as she respected the teacher along with an idea to not start rumours. The idea of normalizing faults in the name of religion is seen here. Even in educational spaces faults are considered as just mistakes in the name of religion. Religion thus shapes silence even when voice is meant to be raised. Endurance and obedience is even demanded by the narrator when the wife of Hazrat is abused. She tries to save the marriage in the sake of the wife and because of the religion and patriarchy. This leads to internalized moral conditioning. By embedding religion in the ordinary rhythms of life Mushtaq critiques faith. She points out the subtly lived religion that sustains unequal power structures while appearing natural.

In the stories, home is first established as a patriarchal space of control. The authority is exercised through gender roles, religion and everyday practices. In “The Arabic Teacher and Gobi Manchurian” the household especially the kitchen functions as a site of obedience which is enforced through routine and cultural expectations. A woman’s role is defined by her ability to conform to the prescribed norms of behaviour and emotional restraint. This reinforces the idea that the domestic sphere exists to regulate female identity. In “The Arabic Teacher and Gobi Manchurian” the patriarchal structure begins to fracture and lead to reconfiguration of home as a space of self-realization. This happens when the wife is abused by the teacher in the name of gobi Manchurian. The moment of violation shatters the idea of moral safety within the household. Although the woman does not openly confront the transgression, her internal awakening and emotional withdrawal. She starts to defy the patriarchy and religion by asking to file a case and divorce the teacher. The story “The shroud” depicts how Yaseen Bua leads to transgression using the threshold as a metaphor. Bua who is kept at the threshold of hope to get the Kafan while Shaziya who is the standard of oppression tries to negotiate and defend herself. When Shaziya thinks that Bua will suppress her pride and come back. Bua self-aware of her situation when kept on the threshold never comes back and breaks the cycle of oppression.

Across both stories Mushtaq represents silence as quite mode of resistance. The characters do not seek to overturn the social system but to change themselves. By choosing endurance over rupture and self-recognition over submission. They carve out the ethical and emotional autonomy within restrictive environment. These small but continuous acts accumulate into a form of

resistance that is sustainable, demonstrating that radical changes can emerge from persistence.

## Conclusion

The four stories titled “Heat Lamp”, “Be a Woman Once, Oh Lord” , “The Shroud” and “The Arabic Teacher and Gobi Manchurian” from Banu Mushtaq’s Booker prize winning work *Heart Lamp: Selected Stories* exposes ways in which women are doubly marginalized in context with patriarchal countries like India and how small acts of resilience will in turn lead to acts of empowerment. The project throws light on how Mushtaq articulates women’s experiences of marginalization within their subaltern identity. It also conveys how silence, which is seen as a form of oppression, is transformed into a tool of resistance. Women's silence is not just shown as powerlessness but a subtle tool against oppression as there is empowerment which lies hidden behind the acts. The stories also redefine the idea of space as the domestic spheres are not sites of oppression alone but reimagined as the site of empowerment and self-awareness. Spirituality is also put forward in a new light making one question about the established norms of religion and is seen based on female subordination and how it shackles a woman’s right.

Banu Mushtaq uses the female characters as the narrators embarking the act of storytelling as an act of female agency as an attempt to make the world hear the voices of the doubly marginalized section of the society, showing how speech and silence work simultaneously as method to draw the emphasis of female narration. The uses of metaphors and imagery show how female identity is closely related to everyday scenarios which are overlooked, just like female presence which is considered as granted by the society. The narrative styles

which include interior monologues adopted by Mushtaq highlights the contribution of the emerging body of Indian Muslim women's writing that in turn acts as an act to reclaim agency within the cultural framework alongside patriarchy. It has contributed to shape a feminist consciousness within the area of cultural marginalization and patriarchal hierarchy emphasizing the idea of female expressionism.

The study opens a door to further explore the aspects such as comparative studies of regional women writers articulating the gendered subjectivities through everyday poetics, which can give a narrow yet broader understanding of the work in comparison of other works of similar aspects which can widen the scope and understanding this idea taking my research as a base.

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