



BANU MUSHTAQ'S *HEART LAMP*: AN ECOFEMINIST RE-READING OF THE VOICE FROM THE MARGIN

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ABSTRACT

2025 International Booker Prize winning book of twelve short stories *Heart Lamp* poignantly voices the margin, specifically the Muslim women, being victims of the persecution of the patriarchal socio-religio-economic dynamics. This paper seeks to explore how Banu Mushtaq brings the marginalized women to the fore against the backdrop of the environment and narrates the struggle of gender and environment leading to the revelation of deprivation, exploitation and consequential predicament. Banu Mushtaq chronicles the lived experiences of the Muslim women and her depiction of their interaction with the feudal as well as capital-centric power-structure transcends and universalizes them in relation to their interlink with the realities that tend to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct their identity, and thus, exhibits their vulnerability in contrast with the extreme intensity of the elements of nature, such as winter, rain, darkness, storm and the other natural forces. Banu Mushtaq, true, questions the nexus among religion, politics and the power-structure which, in collaboration with one another, create oppressive discourses to challenge the agency of women. From the ecofeminist perspective, ensuring gender equality goes with ecological balance which is badly required for the empowerment and agency of women. Borrowing the theoretical framework from the contemporary ecofeminist theory, this paper seeks to explore how the restoration of ecological balance can ensure the gender equality and empowerment of the marginalized women.

Keywords: Margin, Voice, Otherization, Transformation, Resistance

INTRODUCTION

While approaching Banu Mushtaq's *Heart Lamp*, an anthology of twelve exquisite short stories, from the very first page all the stories of the book feel quite familiar due to the author's meticulous visit to the corners of human life, specifically the conditions of women in the patriarchal framework, with a profoundly scathing outlook (Tripathi, 2025). All the characters of twelve stories are from the minority section of people living in Karnataka, an Indian State, mostly guided and controlled by their religious ideology. The life that these people lead outwardly seems humble, colourless, uneventful and insignificant. But the undercurrent of resilience and resistance that pulsates Banu Mushtaq's stories cannot but captivate the readers'



Journal of Educare (JoE)
(A Peer Reviewed Bi-Annual Journal)

ISSN: 3048-9652 (Online)

www.educare.aliah.ac.in

thinking and re-reading. People in her stories seem to be ordinary and insignificant but the world where they inhabit is a sordid space where devotion leads to debt and love slides into servitude. The narrator of the story “Stone Slabs for Shaista Mahal”, of course, a woman, depicts her predicament as a wife of Mujahid, a service holder in the following words:

A wife is usually the one who stays at home, so that makes her the home person. Perhaps then Mujahid is my office person. Che! I have made a mistake again. The office is not mine, after all. How else can I say this? If I use the term yajamana and call him owner, then I will have to be a servant, as if I am an animal or a dog. (p. 7)

Across the stories women have to struggle not only against men but also the social system, ideology and the dominant belief-system. In the story “Heart Lamp”, Meherun’s husband Inayet chooses second wife even if the couple has already had five children. Meherun comes back to her parents’ house after feeling humiliated by her husband’s ingratitude towards her. She comes to her parents and brothers with a hope that they will try to understand her. But the home where she was brought up in her childhood seems to her unfamiliar, strange. Her old and retired father who is coughing all the time grabbing his chest is now dependent on her sons, and so does her mother. They are silent. Her mother weeps in silence and says prayer to God for her daughter’s peace. True, money or economic ability is strongly related to authoritarian power which has gone out of Meherun’s father as he is no more an income generating person. Her sisters-in-law show a kind of cruel indifference to her. Her brothers rebuke her as they think that she has led their honour into ashtray. Conversation between Meherun and her brothers exhibits how cruelly patriarchy treats in a traditional Indian society:

‘Meher, did you inform anyone at home before coming?’

‘No.’

Why? Why didn’t you tell them before leaving? It seems like you have made up your mind to bring us dishonour’ (p.100).

When Meher tries to defend herself and expose her husband’s faithlessness, her mother exhorts her to try to bring her husband back to the right path. Then she piteously cries out:

‘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’. (p.102)



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ISSN: 3048-9652 (Online)

www.educare.aliah.ac.in

The stance that Meherun demonstrates speaks out about resistance she recklessly wrestles to pose against the patriarchal oppression. But she finds nobody beside her in her fight against the attitudes and norms of her faithless husband. Her father, mother, brothers, even neighbours cannot overcome the normative stance set by the patriarchy emanated out of millennium old tradition of the Indian subcontinent. She is bound to go back to her husband's house helplessly after discovering the horrible truth that it is even better to jump into the fire than to oppose a faithless husband, and thus she perceives that she is an 'other', an isolated self devoid of agency in the battleground, and her fight is not against a single man, but a whole system. On the face of such a formidable force, she melts down like "the darkness of the night thaws" (p.111), and realizes the millennium old patriarchal cult that the tasks of a traditional woman are "heirmaking and housekeeping" (Chakravarti, 2017, p. 211).

Further, women, with specific emphasis on their conditions, are traditionally defined, interpreted and constructed in terms of nature since the time immemorial. Nature is traditionally addressed as mother-nature due to its all-pervasive accommodative disposition, tolerance, flexibility and sacrifice. Banu Mushtaq's *Heart Lamp* anthologizes twelve short stories mostly dedicated to the portrayal of the predicament of minority women in the patriarchal backdrop. The author casts women against the forces of nature, such as storm, rain, winter and depicts their helplessness and vulnerability in association with these ecological phenomena. She does it aptly and metaphorically with a view to delving deeper into women's helplessness and voicelessness. Since the inception of human civilization, women live closer to nature than men for many practical reasons, and hence, silence, sublimity and apparent passivity of nature are aptly employed to define their subservient conditions.

With the rise of industrialization, both nature and women have started falling victim to death and destruction. Capitalism intends to maximize profit and hence, it requires more and more cheap labour, and women can meet up this increasing demand of cheap labour in exchange of negligible amount of wages. Due to environmental pollution, excessive use of CFC, emission of carbon, decay of ozone layer agricultural land is losing its fertility; coastal areas are getting barren because of the increase of salinity and other maritime disasters. Consequently, the inhabitants are deranged and shifted to the urban setting. But urbanization accelerates migration of people from rural areas to urban areas, from one country to another country, and thus, "migration became an explosive political issue, destabilizing governments..." (Ghosh, 2025, p. xiv). Such circumstances lead women to uncertainty, and unpredictability soars higher when it is accompanied by religious fundamentalism which usually tends to keep women aloof from income generating activities. It consequently turns women helpless entity with no agency, and thus, they turn subservient to men who are engaged in income generating activities. In the



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(A Peer Reviewed Bi-Annual Journal)

ISSN: 3048-9652 (Online)

www.educare.aliah.ac.in

stories of Banu Mushtaq, all women, specifically belonging to the Muslim community, are housewives and devoid of agency in terms of decision-making regarding childbirth, healthcare, and the second marriage of their husbands, and consequently, their miseries after marriage get multiplied as they totally depend on their husbands for the maintenance of their life. The stereotype set by the traditional patriarch seems to teach the women here in the subcontinent that “[T]he wish of the husband is as the *Vedas* to the wife and if the husband is pleased, then god too is pleased” (Chakravarti, 2017, p. 224), and as soon as the husband dies the woman turns into an outcast, nowhere.

Capitalism turns both man and women into commodities, and the commoditization challenges human emotion and relationship. When religious ideology makes nexus with capitalism, which is masculine in nature, women’s predicament is intensified. Banu Mushtaq explores the precarious conditions of the minority Muslim women living in the fringe of Karnataka, and while producing the narratives of their vulnerability, she sometimes associates them with nature to draw their conditions with more emphatic gesture. She builds up her career as an author in the decades “when the personal-is-political” (Bhasthi, 2025, p. 209) became a cult in the socio-economic reality. Banu lashes her whip upon the back of the hypocritical masculine society which in collaboration with religion suppresses women. Banu Mushtaq very often takes resort to nature or natural elements to depict the predicament of women with more intensity. In the story “Black Cobras” the protagonist Ashraf, who has come with petition to the Mutawalli as her husband has recently chosen a second wife and deserted her and her three children into utter uncertainty, Banu describes the all-engulfing darkness and silence of night turning crueler in association with rain and seclusion, “There was a quietness to the green light emanating from the mosque veranda. A cool breeze from the heavy rain and a peopleless environment” (2025, p. 55). The merciless forces of nature make Ashraf’s predicament more miserable and touchier. She undergoes all injustice inflicted upon her in silence because she is taught by the patriarchs that they must worry about what “boys think of them” (Adichie, 2014, p. 24).

In the story titled “Be A Woman Once, Oh Lord” Banu Mushtaq offers a narrative depicting the subservient predicament of women in association with nature. The story depicts the precarious condition of the narrator whose husband tortures her for dowry. The helplessness of her parents is added to her predicament which makes her think “All I could see were a few green memory trees, as they shed their leaves and grew bare” (203). The narrator’s experiences turn into accusation against God and she asks God,

“Come to earth as a woman, Prabhu!

Be a woman once, oh Lord!” (208)



The story is written in the form of a monologue and the narrator's minute investigation of her experiences derived from her hellish conjugal life with her husband who tortures her for dowry, and choosing second wife. The story "Red Lung" with equal impetus depicts how patriarchy slides into social discrimination, and in this process religious ideology, whatever religion it may be, works as a tool of hegemony. "The Shroud" echoes the same tone of transformation in association with power and wealth. Privileges dull one's capacity to assess other people's dignity, and this is the underlying tone of this short story.

Actually, all the twelve stories of *Heart Lamp* resist the traditional tendency of romanticizing women. Women fight and struggle continuously against the vast backdrop of nature which aptly depicts their triviality and helplessness. They may not fight in the battleground but they fight in their own way in the domestic arena. Their resilience to fight against their husband's demand for dowry, second marriages and sheer negligence challenges the traditional romanticization of women. In many of her short stories, Banu Mushtaq depicts women's predicament in relation to nature's fragility and feebleness. Sometimes women have been cast against the robust forces of nature and from this perspective *Heart Lamp* can be explored from the ecofeminist perspective.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ecofeminism, nowadays, turns into a popular approach to fiction, that investigates women's relationship with and dependence on their surrounding environment. In Bangladesh ecofeminist study of fiction has recently got an impetus due to the increasing involvement of women in income generating activities, and also the rising rate of oppression and exploitation that affect both these women and the rural set up from which they are deranged for both ecological disruption and economic compulsions. Due to environmental pollution and economic exploitation, women are deranged from their root, that is, rural set up which cradles them very closely because of their engagement with agriculture, poultry raising and livestock rearing or horticulture. As the economy is getting corporatized, women cannot compete with the billionaire investors, and their small individual initiative of agricultural work cannot sustain on the face of wide industrializing venture of the Capitalists whose disposition is mostly patriarchal or gender-biased. In such a situation while their husbands are forced to migrate to the cities for survival, women also follow them and become totally dependent on their husbands' income. They are exploited in many ways and there are affinities between women and the environment in terms of falling victim to wide exploitation. Nowadays, it has become a pressing issue not only for the social workers or environment-workers, but also a very crucial subject-matter to literature, especially fiction. Bengali literature specifically Bengali fiction



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showcases with importance the miseries of both women and the surrounding environment in its canvass. Humayun Kabir's *Nadi O Nari* (Women and Rivers, 1952), Adwaita Mallabharman's *Titas ekti Nadir Nam* (A River Called Titas, 1956), Manik Bandyopadhyay's *Padma Nadir Majhi* (The Boatman of the Padma, 1936) are some of the major fictions which depict close affinity between women and the environment. In poetry and short stories of Bengali literature, the portrayal of the close relationship between environment and women is not as much as it is depicted in the fiction. In Jasim Uddin's *Sojan Badiyar Ghat* (Gypsy Wharf, 1933), Duli, a Hindu girl's abortive love affair with a Muslim boy Sojan is depicted against the vast canvas of the rural areas of Bengal and the rivers which serve as a perennial source of living for them. The rivers also impact their emotional life and shapes their joys and sorrows. How river, air, soil and human emotion get intertextualized with one another and how such interaction impacts the life of the traditional women of this part of the world, is very aptly depicted by the poet.

In the same vein, Indian female fiction attains significant amount of attention from literary critics for many things, though specially for their close investigation of women's relationship with the surrounding environment. With the advent of environmental imperialism as an integrated progeny of capitalism which demonstrates the propensity to cause derangement and displacement of human habitation, women grow awareness and develop environmental activism with a view to conserving environment as it is closely related to their own existence. In India, Chipko Movement that took place in 1970s for the conservation of forest from the commercial logging and the government policies on deforestation, is still referred as an example of environmental activism (Chanda, 2014, p. 33). Due to extensive commercialization, forest is cut down, in consequence of which drought takes place and waterbodies are drying up. As in many Indian regions women are to collect dry fire materials and water for domestic use, they are to undergo more troubles as they need to travel farther place in search of them. Not only that because of building banks and embankments, vast track of agricultural land is transformed into desert. Consequently, women along with their families are forced to leave their habitation and in the urban set up they turn into a pool of cheap labour. Homelessness of women is the ultimate consequence of environmental disasters. Miseries of women in association with environmental disruption are portrayed by many Indian fiction authors, such as Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Sohaila Abdulali, Amitav Ghosh and several others. In their oeuvre, women receive significant amount of importance because like Rabindranath Tagore, they realize that "women are the fundamental custodians of the cultural life..." (Bose, 2024, p. 116). Consequently, they have brought women to the canvas of their fiction, and cast them against natural background to show how they are reduced to nothingness by the oppressive patriarchy and the masculine power-structure. Masculinity is characterized



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by the promiscuity of dominating upon the nature, an entity metaphorically representing voicelessness, tolerance, and passivity.

But this issue of ecofeminism is not discussed much in the canvass of poetry and short stories in comparison with fiction. Banu Mushtaq holds a distinct place in terms of depicting women's location in the dominant culture, cast against the vast canvass of the ecological dynamics. Her women do not seem to be direct victims of environmental pollution or disaster. Their fragility and vulnerability are depicted in comparison with nature. Night is dark but the darkness of cruelty upon women of the patriarchal society appears more intense while it is cast against the secluded night and its impenetrable darkness. Pathetic fallacy is employed with a subtle and delicate dexterity to delve deeper into the voice women for freedom, justice and equity. Hopelessness of women is portrayed metaphorically in association with the sordid and secluded darkness of the night. In the eponymous story "The Heart Lamp" the protagonist Meherun's helplessness is depicted with emphatic intensity in association with the darkness of the night at which she comes out of her room to the stretching yard with a bottle of kerosene to burn herself alive and thus, commit suicide. The narrator narrates, "She stared into darkness and made sure she thought of how she had nobody, how no one wanted her, as she poured the kerosene on herself" (110). Here the seclusion of the dead of night interprets the helplessness of Meherun and thus, her alienated self has been universalized in terms of the predicament of women in the margin.

Women's relationship with environment is ambivalent, and it is gender discrimination which leads women more to the environment. Because of coldness that they receive from patriarchal society they gradually grow more dependence on environment. And hence, when the environment fails women suffer terribly. Kamala Markandya's *Nectre in a Sieve* depicts Rukmani's struggle after marriage with a peasant Nathan. Society changes; economic framework changes but the fate of the village women does not alter, and they seem to be fated to wrestle with poverty, unemployment, deprivation and exploitation. Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* depicts the struggle of Nanda Kaul, an elderly woman who seeks to live in the Himalayan hills for solitude and freedom, though her desire is a far cry as she still continues to bear the agony of the troubled relationship between parents and siblings. If viewed from the ecocritical perspective, Arundhati Roys's *God of Small Things* portrays how women struggle against the exploitation of environment. Industrial development and the reckless rise of capitalism cause environmental damage. Arundhati Roy describes that once the river Manachal was overflowing. But now it is polluted and dying. Hence, the women who were once were once dependent on nature are now jobless, and consequently penniless.



Women and environment are intertextualized in ecofeminist portrayal. Actually, intersectionality is a technique which is used to describe the situations of women in relation to the surrounding environment. For instance, vulnerability of nature is metaphorically associated with that of women. The sublimity and tolerance, silence and consistency of the surrounding nature or environment interpret the similar qualities of women. Even in Shakespeare's *Othello* Desdemona's vulnerability and helplessness are narrated rhetorically through the willow tree. When Desdemona feels deceived by her own choice of her husband, she finds her fragility similar to the vulnerability of a willow tree, and hence, she sings:

A poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree

Sing all a green willow

.....

Sing willow, willow, willow-/ My garland shall be. (Shakespeare, 2010, p. 267)

Willow tree represents Desdemona's profound sorrow and fragility. Even Ophelia in *Hamlet* out of frenzy climbs up a willow tree and slips down into a fountain where she drowns and dies. Such intersections between ecological aspects and women actually mark identity constructions, symbolic representations, and social structures (Kings, 2017, p. 68). Even in the 21st century, women from the working class are forced towards "everyday activism in part by lack of power in parliamentary and local politics and limited power in the labour movement" (Cagatay, 2025, p. 350). Due to the lack of opportunities to work outside, "women engaged in forms of labour activism that draw on their work as mothers and as wives as often as on their experience of paid work" (Cagatay, 2025, p. 360). But patriarchy does not call all these jobs of women wage labour that is usually done by men. As they are not involved in income generating activities, they fall victim to various sorts of humiliation. Banu Mushtaq depicts how financial women's dependence pushes them towards grave miseries inflicted upon them by men, the income generating agency. In the story "Black Cobras", the protagonist, Ashraf an impoverished woman is depicted in association with nature will all possible vulnerabilities. Her husband has recently taken second wife and deserted her with all her hungry and ailing children. Her youngest child Munni, a suckling baby, is seriously ill, and she direly needs food and medicare. But Ashraf's husband cares about neither his wife nor his children. When Ashraf goes to Mutawalli so that he may convince her husband to give some money at least for the treatment of the ailing child, she receives nothing but the cruelty of her husband that leads Munni to death and Ashraf to more agonies. Her vulnerability is depicted in association with the aspects of nature. It is raining on the night she is waiting for verdict from the Mutawalli.



The dark night, stormy wind, rain, rain, just like pathetic fallacy depict the intensity of Ashraf's miseries.

Relevantly enough, even in the Rig Vedic era (1500-1000 BC), the "position of women was high and honourable" (Mazumder, 2008, p. 208), and marriage was considered to be a sacred union. But with the advent of European colonisation, the day to day thoroughfares started to be considered from commercial perspective. That was a vital paradigm shift in the social interaction and relationship among the people. In line with the corporatizing mission the union between a man and a woman in wedlock gradually lost its emotive faculty, and thus, women, as they were segregated from industry-based income generating activities, they inescapably fell victim to various abusive behaviour from the patriarch. Women's deteriorating status relates to the rise of industrialization and their consequential segregation from economic activities, as agriculture which was previously their source of income, succumbs to the industrialization. Under such circumstances, the concept that husband is to a woman like a god, gets widespread publicity and recognition on the part of the patriarchal society. Banu Mushtaq, in her stories of *Heart Lamp*, depicts the consequential miseries and woes of women, after being alienated from the agricultural land or environment, caught up by the corporate economic framework leading man-woman relationship to the situations in which it can be measured not by human feelings, but by 'give and take' disposition.

In this connection, the review explicitly notes that the ecofeminist nexus has been extensively analyzed in a good number of full-length novels but there is a significant dearth of critical academic concentration given to how ecofeminist anxieties, intersectionality, and environmental degradation are articulated within short stories. Hence, in connection with this, Banu Mushtaq's short stories can be a suitable field of exploration to hear the voice of resistance from the margin. In addition, this paper seeks to connect the shift of historical paradigm from the classical eras to industrial colonization, as it finds a gap in examining 21st-century short stories that address the recent wave of exploitation in the digital and micro-economic framework which affects rural women and their frequently changing relationship with everyday activism.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The in-depth analysis of Banu Mushtaq's short stories from *Heart Lamp* is based on a multidimensional theoretical framework that fuses radical ecofeminism with postcolonial theorist and philosopher Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of subaltern silencing and Afro-American feminist critic bell hooks's concept of the "homeplace" as a site of resistance.



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ISSN: 3048-9652 (Online)

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Actually, Banu Mushtaq's *Heart Lamp* deserves to be interpreted and analyzed in ecofeminist theoretical framework, though, in addition, Gayatri Charavorty Spivak's concept of subalternism and silencing in the margin and Afro-American feminist bell hooks' concept of homeplace as a site of resistance are very relevant to pursuing the research question in this paper. Nature, an inevitable ingredient of ecosystem, can aptly analyze human conditions because ecocritics hold a belief that "our ideas about nature are too often a product of our fears and desires, rather than a response to reality" (Tyson, 2023, p. 422). Radical ecofeminists cherish a conviction that women, by instinct, are closer to nature than men. Even the voicelessness of women in the patriarchal society is metaphorically interpreted in association with the absence of verbal expression of nature. They lack proper language to proclaim their agency. Actually, "language is the privileged medium in which we 'make sense' of things, in which meaning is produced and exchanged" (Hall, 2013, p. xvii). The language of women is defined and decided by the male-dominated society which assumes the disposition of the capitalists who cause damage and destruction to nature, and thus, exercise their masculine power upon nature as, in a patriarchal society, men oppress women for silencing their voice and reducing down them to subordination.

Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak criticizes both Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud because she thinks their conceptions of alienation are incomplete. While Marx delineating the concept of alienation, he does not take women into account. Again, when Freud delineates the concept of penis envy, he skips the idea that womb is a site of productivity. Spivak refers to the traditional definition of women, which puts a woman as a dichotomy or binary opposition of a man. But as a deconstructionist, Spivak challenges the dichotomy because deconstruction considers nothing as absolute or constant. But she further believes that definition, on the other hand, is needed to keep going. In her words:

The only way that I can see myself making definitions are necessary in order to keep us going, to allow us to take a stand. The only way that I can see myself making definitions is in a provisional and polemical one: I construct my definition as a woman not in terms of a word currently in use. "Man" is such a word in common usage. Not *a* word, but *the* word. I therefore fix my glance upon this word even as I question the enterprise of redefining the premises of any theory (Spivak, 1996, p. 54).

Gendered propensity of defining women is interdisciplinary in terms of intersectionality of cultures and distinct geographical realities. For example, when William Jones who, in these days, is popularly known as the first orientalist, and being appointed puisne judge to the Supreme Court of Judicature at Fort William, while translating Kalidasa's drama *Sakuntala*,



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reconstructed, to be specific, Europeanized the eponymous heroine and made her fit, in terms of physical stature and complexion, for the European readership. Manu S. Pillai rightly asserts:

... this tendency to 'purify' assumed a tone of moral judgement. So, if Jones was feted for his translations, into the same translations were also braided Western, Christian sensibilities. Where in Kalidasa's original, Sakuntala is sweaty, for example, Jones transcribed a glowing complexion to avoid shocking white readers with the text's open sensuality. Where her breasts are described, his inner senses purged the line, so that Sakuntala in Europe was a deterged, redated heroine. (2024, p. 145).

Portrayal of Sakuntala drenched in sweat aligns the ecological or climatological realities, geography and ethnographical environment of the subcontinent where Banu Mushtaq meticulously detects these limitations with women and the colonized mind in European framework with men. The polished and deterged figure of Sakuntala that William Jones offered to his European readers is also favorite to a man in the patriarchal society. For example, in the short story "Stone Slabs for Shaista Mahal" Banu Mushtaq dissects the mindset of Iftikhar who married Shaista at her twenty and fathered seven children. But only forty days after her untimely death, he marries a young woman of only eighteen, a typically deterged woman like Sakuntala in Jones's translation, in place of Shaista, a woman surrounded by children and suffering from inherent ailments quite common with the traditional women of the subcontinent.

Again, even in the same story, when Mujahid compartmentalizes women by placing mother and wife side by side for demonstrating the unique love of a mother, his wife Zeenat, just like a subaltern in Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" feels unable to resist this masculine discourse with a counter discourse. According to Mujahid, mother's love is of special kind and unique, and if mother dies you will not find a woman like her with the same affection and love. On the other hand, if a wife dies "one can get another wife" (p. 13). The narrator of the story Zeenat ironically refers to her grandmother's analogy that the shock emanated from a wife's death is just like a wound in the elbow, and it is extreme instantly though very soon it fades away.

But the most common aspect of all the twelve stories is that the narrators are women from the minority segment of the society, especially Muslim community, and during an in-depth perusal readers hear the voice from the margin. In this connection, Afro-American feminist bell hooks sounds very relevant when she claims that homeplace is a site of resistance to the patriarchal process of stereotyping Indian women. It is usually found that "An Indian girl is brought up on myths and legends celebrating these archetypes, and inculcated with the belief that her mission in life is to try and live up to them (husbands) as lords and masters" (Ho, 2005, p. 20). From



exterior, the location of Banu Mushtaq's women is mostly the margin, encapsulating the minority, especially the Muslims in Karnatak. These women like traditional Indian women deprived of education and completely depending on men for livelihood, and they are narrating their stories, and this very task is also vehemently like "making a homeplace, of making home a community of resistance..." (hooks, 1990, p. 42). The liberatory struggle of the women is seriously undermined by patriarchy which rigorously tends to subvert the homeplace into a site of patriarchal domination upon women. The characters of Mutawalli in the stories, such as "Fire Rain", and "Black Cobras" obviously depicts the dominating force against which women are restlessly struggling to construct their own identity. Banu Mushtaq depicts the struggle of women with analogies, metaphors, references from the environment, which invites this paper to make an ecofeminist study of the text. The curse of a deprived and deceived sister is compared to a rain of fire that showers upon the deceiving brother. Even in English translation Deepa Bhasi retains some words and phrases from the local Kannada language, which inspires the readers to peep into the margin, the voicelessness and listen to them. Not only this, Banu Mushtaq's use of the excellent cadence of syntax, language of the marginalized people of Karnatak, women's negotiation with the social and religious institutions lend weight to the view that *Heart Lamp* can be aptly studies from the ecofeminist perspective.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

With immense fortitude Banu Mushtaq depicts how women's lives are shaped, constructed and re-constructed by patriarchal norms, religious authority, domestic chores, marriages, childbirth capacity and motherhood. All the social, political and religious institutions claim absolute subjugation of women, and in the way of implementation of these expectations they do not care about human aspects of women. They rather fortify their dominance and hegemony with narratives, myths, logocentric religious faiths, stories and many other sources which deliberately established their superiority upon women. It is quite similar to the process in which man establishes his superiority upon nature. They celebrate the discourse which tempts them to cherish the norm that on this planet everything is created for human beings, and taking resort to such discourse humans destroy forest, kill rivers, contaminate seas and desperately kills wild animals in need and even while there is no need to kill them. Even the overall passivity of women aligns the passivity and voicelessness of nature. Aligning *Heart Lamp* with all that are already said, it can be affirmed that Banu Mushtaq depicts her female characters from ecofeminist perspective.

But *Heart Lamp* is not wholly an ecofeminist text, and here women are not directly cast against nature for struggle as an antagonistic agent. Nature now and then relevantly appears in course



of the flow of the narrative, but it is not wholly anthropocentric. True, in the postcolonial situations, women are to fight “with multilayered traditions rooted in indigenous custom with overlays of colonial influence” (Katrak, 2006, p. 156). As a result, feminism develops a number of ramifications, and ecofeminism is one of them. But it is also political as well as patriarchal that Vandana Shiva mentions in an interview. In her words, “Ecofeminism is a good term for distinguishing a feminism that is ecological from the kind of feminisms that have become extremely technocratic. I would even call them very patriarchal” (2011). She claims it rightly as nature or ecosystem is marked as a site of voicelessness and patriarchy being aided by religion, tradition and culture deliberately tries to control voice, resistance and counter discourse on the part of women. Banu Mushtaq, in this connection, depicts the voicelessness of women and her depiction becomes more intense while she has borrowed metaphors, imagery from the environment around women.

To sum up, *Heart Lamp* truly resists a simplistic and essentialist application of ecofeminism. It is also evident that the book avoids the reductionist trope of casting women as direct, antagonistic combatants against the externalized forces of nature. Instead, the natural environment functions as a fluid, non-anthropocentric presence embedded within the narrative fabric. True, postcolonial female subject have to navigate multilayered traditions where indigenous customs are deeply entangled with colonial configurations of the power-structure. As a result, Mushtaq’s ecofeminist disposition aligns with several ecofeminists’ conceptualization of the discipline as an inherently political assessment—one that distinguishes itself from technocratic, assimilationist feminisms, inadvertently replicating patriarchal power-structure. By treating both the ecosystem and the female body as twin sites of enforced silence, *Heart Lamp* deploys ecological metaphors and localized environmental imagery not as mere backdrop, but as vital semiotic tools to amplify the subaltern voice and articulate structural defiance.

CONCLUSION

Banu Mushtaq’s *Heart Lamp* offers a multifaceted lens through which readers find how Indian women from the margin negotiates with the discriminatory forces of the society, mostly represented by patriarchy, “one of the dominant systems that as a debilitating social construct has led to gender oppression universally” (Kumar and S. Armstrong, 2025, p. 5). But patriarchal discourse is never monolithic; it is rather polyphonic for its diverse ramifications and close engagement with race, culture, class, tradition, and above all, religion. In the existing social framework, women cannot speak out or rebel because it goes against the myths, and legends which are constructed to suppress them. But for attaining sustainable development



goals globally, women must be free from all the ostracizing forces against which Banu Mushtaq formidably raises questions. She has culled the materials of her stories from all around her, but the focus that she sets, that is, the gender-oppression and exploitation of women in the name of religion and tradition, draws wide attention for the stretching range of impact of the dominance of the myths and legends constructed by the religious narratives. Though *Heart Lamp* can be perused from various perspectives, ecofeminist perspective, which this paper emphasises, opens up a new horizon for the successive researchers to juxtapose women side by side with nature, and they may, thus, explore this area more extensively and add new ideas and findings to the existing academia.

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Journal of Educare (JoE)
(A Peer Reviewed Bi-Annual Journal)

ISSN: 3048-9652 (Online)

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