

Restructuring Belief System for Environmental Harmony: An Ecological study of Banu Mushtaq's The Heart Lamp

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Abstract

The present article shed lights on how the framed belief system in society threatens the ecological sustainability. There is a necessity to collapse and rebuild the belief system which disguised as tradition and moral value to dominate the others. Despite of technological advancements and scientific revolution, the age old oppression still exists to the minorities. In Heart lamp Banu Mushtaq exposes how the rigidly constructed society disrupts the hormonal structure of sustainable future. The short story Heart lamp illuminates the hidden gapes that create the disparity between oppressed victim and dominating society. It reflects the ways of belief system that suppress women in terms of religion, caste and gender. With reference to Althusser's Ideological apparatus, people tend to be cooperated with belief system by the fear of social rejection, ridicule and isolation. When it comes for the environmental concerns, the belief system paves the way for disharmonies and restless society. The protagonist of the short story resemble the womanhood of Muslim minority and the ecological collapse that occurs through the belief system which exploits nature. When care and compassion are being the root of human nature, the framed ideologies act in favour of powerful group that neglects the vulnerable group remains silent. The inequality among the minorities especially among Muslim Women disrupts the union and rhythm of life which is the base for ecological sustainability. Neglecting potential and freedom of women using the imposed rules reflects the reality of the broken society that questions the sustainability. To maintain the ecological balance in a society, people should critique and challenge the existing narrow principles which lays the foundation for powerful versus powerless, voiced versus voiceless. Here, the author speaks for the silenced women of her community.

Key words: Belief System, Ecology, Sustainability, Ecofeminism, Marxism.

Introduction

Man creates the structure intend to dominate the vulnerable beings. When nature and human beings goes hand in hand utilising all the natural sources for the betterment of society, Human beings still create the disparity focusing on ruling and suppressing the rest of the people. Literature represent the dominant nature of human in the form of novels and poems. It sheds light on the dark sphere where the need to refine the dominant structure and manipulative belief system to be

deconstructed. In Raymond William's Country and the city, the writer talks about the calamity the man made to swindle the natural sources mercilessly for his own profits. The evolution of Industrial revolution happens during the time is projected. Exploitation of Women is compared to exploitation of nature. Both have been suppressed and constructed in favour of dominating power.

Banu Mushtaq's short story collection Heart Lamp originally written in Kannada and translated into English by Deepa Bhashti published in 2024. The short story collection comprises of 12 stories focus on the lives of Muslim Women in Southern India under patriarchy and gender inequality. The book won National Booker prize in 2025. Though the major concern of the stories deals with suppression of women, people can interpret it from the lens of Eco reading. The Heart lamp implicitly refers to the light of the human soul which can otherwise call it as soul of earth. The spark of the lamp illuminates the entire women race from vulnerable communities.

When one analyse the root cause of the division, the reason may trace back to an imbalanced power sources. Men are one of the species like Plants and Animals yet they constructed their own society aloof from nature neglecting the sustainable environment. Principle and dogmas were made to rule the vulnerable especially Women and children. The present study selected a short story from the collection and analyse it through the light of ecology and eco feminism. The story project the life of a married woman who is the mother of few children yet she was abandoned by her in-laws family. The suffering never heeds attention from others, the agony which every women live through. They are exploited in terms of the super structure called family and family and society where rules favour for the main stream not the marginalised voiceless people. Pathetic condition of Muslim women and their everyday lives through the unequal society they belong is reflected in the narrative.

The Heart Lamp explored the life of an ordinary married Homemaker called Mehrun who is married and abandoned by her husband later. Her family left her to face the struggle all alone instead of lending ears to her pain and stand for her. The article studies the plight of married Muslim Women in the context of southern India. Voicing her stance may assist to understand the striking realities of Minority communities among the dominant population of voiced. It is necessary to focus on the life of silenced vulnerable communities who neither comes on the spot light nor visible in the mass of population. Here, the Woman suffer in terms of blind belief system which encourage the suppression and injustice in disguise of religion and ethics.

Review of Literature

Vinaya Mary in her article "Class and Gender Intersections in Banu Mushtaq's Heart Lamp" argued the different dimension of victimization that suppress the Women. Dr. Rameshwar S. Solanke metaphorically interpreted the lamp as an object and soul in the article "Illuminating the Inner World: Metaphorical Interpretations of Banu Mushtaq's Heart Lamp". Sowmya Mary Thomas examined the survival and resistance of muslim women in southern Indian in her article, "The Sacred and the Subversive: Faith and Resistance in Banu Mushtaq's "Heart Lamp".

Some scholars interpret the silence as systemic oppression in the patriarchal society. The paper draws on Althusser's Ideological apparatus and Maria Mies's Ecofeminist concepts. While many scholars infused the short story with Spivak's can the subaltern speaks? , this article intersect Ecofeminism and Marxism.

Methodology

The paper employs the qualitative method of analysis. It makes use of

1. Close reading method for textual analysis

The study selected one short story from the collection and examine the narratives, themes and symbols to highlight the crux of argument. Non-linear narrative reflects the Protagonist's fragmented self and voice.

2. Ecofeminism for theoretical framework

Maria Mie's concept of Ecofeminism where she connects environmental exploitation with patriarchal and capitalist violence. She argues that women associates to nature has been severed by extractive and male dominated system. Her idea of Housewifization describes how Women are reduced to the status of housewives even when engaging in productive labour making their work appear as natural than economic production. She explained the invisible labour which highlighted the productive and reproductive of Women in both Global North and South is hidden and unaccounted in economic calculations. The Protagonist, Mehrun who is the mother of five children, abandoned by her husband and not supported by her own family has not been considerate to stand for. Enduring the long term exploitation and not resisting becomes her mode of survival.

"Amma, don't I have something called heart? Don't I have feelings? I cannot respect him as my husband when he has gone off like this" (Mushtaq 102). These are the voices of many women in rural southern India especially in Muslim Minorities.

3. Althusser's Theory of Ideological State Apparatuses

Heart Lamp offers the literary space to examine the concept of ideology within social structure. Althusser's formulation of ideology emphasizes that power reproduces itself through institutions such as family, religion, and culture, which operate by securing consent rather than enforcing submission through force. In "Heart Lamp," the family represents as the primary ideological apparatus through which gender roles are naturalized and internalized.

The protagonist's emotional labour, silence and self-sacrifice are not imposed through explicit violence but are normalized through expectations embedded in domestic relationships. "Meher, what are you saying? This is too much. He is a man, and he has stamped on some slush, but he will wash it off where there is a water and then come back inside. There is no stain will stick to him" (Mushtaq 102). The home thus becomes a site of ideological reproduction where patriarchal authority appears inevitable and morally justified. This normalization produces what may be termed gendered subjectivity a condition in which the female subject recognizes herself primarily through relational duty rather than autonomous identity.

Religion functions as a parallel ideological apparatus in the narrative, not merely as spiritual practice but as a discursive framework that legitimizes gender hierarchy. "But you covered me in a burkha and brought me up such that I would not even let my saree seragu slip from my head, didn't you?" (Mushtaq 102). Communal expectations rooted in moral propriety regulate women's behaviour, reinforcing obedience through notions of honor, modesty, and virtue. Importantly, Mushtaq does not present religion as inherently oppressive; rather, she exposes how religious discourse can be appropriated within patriarchal social structures to maintain control over women's bodies and emotions. This nuanced portrayal allows for an interpretation in which ideology operates through culturally embedded belief systems rather than external authoritarian enforcement.

Cultural surveillance further strengthens ideological interpellation. Gossip, shame, and communal judgment act as disciplinary tools that ensure conformity. The protagonist internalizes these expectations, demonstrating Althusser's argument that ideology "hails" individuals into subject positions that they come to accept as natural. The absence of visible resistance in the story does not indicate passivity; instead, it reflects the depth of ideological penetration, where disagreement becomes difficult because the subject's identity is inseparable from the very structures that oppress her.

Results

The study explores the invisible silenced exploitation of Women in rural southern India in terms of labels such as Gender, family, society and religion. Though Heart lamp can be read from various

perceptions, the article insists on ecofeminist and Marxist perspectives. Here, the leading character Meher seems a sample for the entire women in Muslim community. By arguing such unnoticed issues, people can come with practical strategies to challenge and break such norms which hold the Women in trap. The protagonist gave up her desire to be educated and followed the instruction of her family to get married and give birth to children. The Blind submissiveness have to be eroded from the mind of Women who still depends on her family and prejudiced belief system.

Discussion

People suffer Global warming and Climate change yet unaware that their action create the calamity. Living in technological advanced digital era, there are more space for alienation and silent suffering and resource extracts. Both Women and Nature has their voice to claim for their freedom and recognition. Thus the Heart lamp can be interpreted as the soul of Women and Soul of the Earth that demands listening with empathy and warns the overexploitation. Further study can be done in comparative study on the living condition of Women in North and South. It can also be analysed from psychological point of view.

There is a necessity to reconstruct the belief system to heal the internal wounds and safe guard the further erosion in the condition of Women Lives in Sothern India. "It reveals how metaphor not only enhances literary traditions but also illuminates the unheard melancholia of human beings" (Solanke). Unheard melancholy should be heard with compassion and immediate change. The leading character exposed to the unjust treatment in structure of family yet she continued with her religious practises of wearing Burkha which is ingrained in her mind. Thomas argues:

Meherun's own practice of spirituality provides her strength and consolation while still allowing her to notice systemic injustices. Even in her darkest moments of desperation, whereby she entertains self-immolation, her connection to her children - described in almost transcendent terms - is what makes her continue on. (5)

Patriarchal authority echoed in the narrative of Meher's husband who does not abide by the constructed belief system which is liberal for men like him to fluctuate according to the situation. The voiceless protagonist stands helpless when her husband treats her unjust." What have I not given you – to wear, to eat? Who is going to stop me? I am with a woman who makes me happy". (Mushtaq 105). It shows how women are made to serve the men without questioning him for the unethical stance.

Conclusion

Banu Mushtaq's *The Heart Lamp* is the witnessing testimony of silent suffering and victim of male constructed belief system which suppress women in long term. The imbalanced Belief system needs to do reconstructed to maintain the order and harmony in the society. To ensure sustainability in the environment, the necessary action should be taken care of in terms of Gender Equality and just treatment of vulnerable minorities. Thus the short story represent the plight of Muslim Women in Southern India which may varies from North and other part of the world. Literature displays the restraint and silenced voice through different characters who actually caricature the people in real life. One can find the autobiographical elements in the work while the author herself hailed from Muslim community in Kannada region. Though not everyone had the opportunity to voice out and remind the world that women empowerment is not successful yet and every pages of the book to be read fully, Banu Mushtaq got the attention of many academic circle to understand the reality behind developing country. As Maria Mie says women and environment of both North and South are negatively impacted by the capitalist patriarchy. In her book Ecofeminism she proposes that in order to the environment and women people must reject the idea of unrestrained economic growth

and mass consumerism. Imagine a world with equality construct the sustainable future. When the old belief system brings wide gap among people and societal structure, the ecological sustainability stays unattainable. Women and nature should be treated with dignity and freedom which returns the secured environment to live in harmony.

The study made use of references from the primary texts and other scholarly articles to substantiate the argument. Drawing from the theoretical stance such as Ecofeminism and Marxism, the article seems eye opener for various theoretical interpretation of the texts. Here the Lamp in the title is objectified to represents the social reality. The lamp which upholds the light and yet alive in the soul of Humanity and soul of the Earth. Though it is hidden under the patriarchal man made cover, it still shed lights on the darkness of humanity. Invisible and long term suppression never extinguishes the spark of the light. Thus the study displays the hidden reality of the lives of Women in Southern India. Further research can be made from other Minority groups such as focusing on Children, Christians and People from other part of South Asia, their lives and struggles.

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