



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Illuminating the Inner World: Metaphorical Interpretations of Banu Mushtaq's *Heart Lamp*

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ABSTRACT

Banu Mushtaq's short story *Heart Lamp* unveils an allegory of human emotions, spiritual resilience, and the struggle between in-depth darkness and the quest for light. This paper offers a metaphorical interpretation of the lamp as both an object and a symbolism of the self. The lamp is a metaphor of the heart which suggests warmth, endurance, and delicacy by serving spirituality that reflects women's suppressed voices and invisible pain. The story expresses traditions of mystical literature where light symbolizes divine presence, hope, and moral rebirth. At the same time, Mushtaq reworks on traditional associations to highlight gendered subjectivity by turning the lamp into a site of both empowerment and openness. Through a close reading, this study examines how metaphors of light, fire, and shadow reveals the complexities of identity, memory, and existential angst. The paper focuses on *Heart Lamp* which transcends its narrative simplicity and offers a meditation on inner life. It reveals how metaphor not only enhances literary traditions but also illuminates the unheard melancholia of human beings.

Keywords: emotional survival; patriarchy; refigure; liberation; spirituality

FULL PAPER

Introduction

Many novelists have employed tools for exploring their work of art. 'Metaphors' are one of the important jargon used by the novelist to connote deeper meanings of the text. The realistic depiction is not enough to convey the meaning. Therefore, writers often use symbolism, images, allegories, metaphors to convey the deeper meaning of their work of art. One can view the work of art with many angles if author effectively use such devices in their work. Metaphor is phenomenal feature of language and literature. It is a figure of speech that the writers use to denote multi-layers of textual meaning.

It is important to discuss some of the definitions of eminent scholars to understand metaphor. According to M. H. Abrams, "In a metaphor, a word or expression that in literal usage denote one kind of thing is applied to a distinctly different kind of thing, without asserting a comparison" (*A Glossary* 102). It means two dissimilar things are compared to connote deep meaning. For example: 1) Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj was a lion in the battlefield. The underlined two words show implied comparison. 2) The Camel is the Ship of the desert. The underlined two words also show implied comparison. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* defines metaphor as "a word or phrase used to describe sub/sth else, in a way that is different from its normal use, in order to show that the two things have the same qualities and to make the description more powerful" (Hornby 976). It means, an object is compared which is not associated with that object. The similar qualities are shown without using the words 'so', 'like', 'as', 'so as.' etc. It is 'implied simile.' I. A. Richards, in his book, *Practical Criticism*, says "A metaphor is a shift, a carrying over of a word from its normal use to a new use" (221).

The modern thinkers and philosophers are revived the metaphorical theories. The significant milestone is Max Black's essay entitled "Metaphor" (1955) in which he extends Richards views of metaphor in a detailed way. He views that two different things are associated with each other in a similar platform. He goes further and refined the concept of metaphor by saying that "it would be more illuminating in some of these cases to say that the metaphor creates the similarities" (Abrams, *A Glossary* 214). The metaphor, one of the major figure of speech, is used to convey new meanings of a literary text. It is used in a different genre in literature by eminent writers. William Wordsworth defines poetry as 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling' (Das and Mohanty, editors. Wordsworth, "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" 35) M. H. Abrams in his *The Mirror and the Lamp*, says "Wordsworth's metaphor, 'overflow',

suggests the underlying physical analogy of a container- a fountain or natural spring, perhaps- from which water brims over” (47). The central metaphor, one may find in Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*, in which the ‘whale’ is, a metaphor for ‘evil spirit’ in the world. In Joseph Conrad’s *The Heart of Darkness*, darkness is the metaphor of superiority of Europeans over Africans.

Literature often uses metaphor as a means to express the unheard. It aims at exploring inexpressible regions of human self. In Banu Mushtaq’s short story *Heart Lamp*, the lamp is not only a physical object but also a metaphorical extension of the self. It suggests warmth, endurance, and vulnerability. It also serves as a symbol of spiritual embodiment and emotional survival. *Heart Lamp* through metaphorical interpretations, seeks to understand how Mushtaq constructs an inner world where light becomes both a necessity and a resistance. Metaphor, as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have argued, is not merely a literary ornament but a fundamental mode of human thought: “We understand the world metaphorically because metaphors structure the way we perceive and act” (*Metaphors We Live By* 5). In *Heart Lamp*, the metaphor of light operates on multiple levels: it reflects psychological states, spiritual journeys, and the socio-cultural conditions of women’s lives.

The *Heart Lamp* can be read as a metaphor for women’s silenced subjectivity from a feminist perspective. In patriarchal contexts, women’s inner lives are often rendered invisible, their voices are often ignored. Feminist hermeneutics, as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza tells the need to revisit symbols that have marginalized women (*In Memory of Her* 23). In this connection, Mushtaq’s metaphor of the lamp carries immense symbolic power. It reflects women’s inner resilience that suggests fragile forms of light that has potential to resist darkness. A key textual line, “*In Mehrun’s chest, a lamp burned quietly, its flame wavering yet refusing to die,*” captures the essence of the story. It reveals how her inner light inflames despite emotional and social hardships. Beyond its gendered implications, the lamp also resonates with themes of memory and existential longing. It illuminates not only the present but also the hidden recesses of the past, symbolizing memory as a light that refuses to fade. In this sense, the lamp becomes a metaphorical archive of human experience, preserving fragments of identity against the erosion of time. The *Heart Lamp* articulates the human desire for meaning in a world often shadowed by despair. The fragile flame, always at risk of extinguishing, mirrors the precariousness of existence itself. Yet, the story insists on the possibility of renewal: the lamp can be refueled, rekindled, reignited. This cyclical process symbolizes resilience, underscoring Mushtaq’s affirmation of life amidst suffering. Mushtaq’s use of imagery deepens the metaphorical resonance of the lamp. The oscillation between

light and shadow, flame and darkness, brightness and dimness, constructs a poetics of metaphor that mirrors the fluctuations of human emotion. The language evokes both vulnerability and radiance, suggesting that illumination is never absolute but always partial, always contested. The interplay of imagery also situates the story within the aesthetics of modern South Asian writing, where domestic objects frequently become sites of metaphorical significance. By centering the lamp, Mushtaq transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary, demonstrating how metaphor can transfigure lived experience into literary expression. To fully appreciate the metaphor, one must consider the cultural resonance of lamps in South Asian traditions. Lamps are lit in temples, mosques, and homes, symbolizing both material and spiritual presence. They are objects of devotion, memory, and continuity. By internalizing this cultural symbol into the “heart,” Mushtaq simultaneously personalizes and universalizes its meaning.

Thus, the “heart lamp” bridges individual emotion and collective tradition. It is both deeply personal and culturally rooted, speaking across boundaries of religion, gender, and geography. Mushtaq’s narrative technique reinforces the metaphorical structure. The story unfolds not through linear plot but through images, impressions, and emotional textures. The lamp appears at crucial moments, guiding the reader into the protagonist’s interiority. In this sense, the story itself functions as a metaphorical journey, moving from darkness to light, from confusion to insight. The use of metaphor in narrative form echoes Ricoeur’s notion that stories “refigure” time and experience, enabling readers to dwell within the symbolic world of the text. *Heart Lamp* thus becomes both a personal story and a universal allegory. The metaphor of the lamp carries unmistakable spiritual overtones. In Islamic and Sufi traditions, the “light of the heart” is a recurrent motif, as in the famous *Ayat an-Nur* (“Verse of Light”) in the Qur’an, which compares divine presence to a niche containing a lamp. Similarly, in Hindu and Buddhist traditions, lamps signify awakening, purity, and liberation. Mushtaq’s metaphor resonates with these traditions while transcending them, positioning the heart as a sacred space where the divine and human intersect. By invoking this imagery, Mushtaq situates her story within a broader spiritual discourse, making *Heart Lamp* not only a personal meditation but also a contribution to the universal language of metaphorical spirituality.

Conclusion

Banu Mushtaq’s *Heart Lamp* transcends its narrative simplicity to offer a profound meditation on metaphor, memory, and inner life. The lamp becomes more than a physical object: it is a vessel of identity, a symbol of survival, and a

metaphorical archive of women's silenced experiences. Through the imagery of light and shadow, Mushtaq situates the struggle for resilience within both mystical traditions of illumination and feminist concerns of visibility. This paper has argued that *Heart Lamp* demonstrates the power of metaphor to illuminate the invisible dimensions of human existence. By reworking traditional associations of light into gendered, embodied, and existential contexts, Mushtaq redefines illumination as both a spiritual and political act. Ultimately, the story affirms that the heart lamp, fragile yet enduring, continues to shine as a metaphor for resilience, resistance, and the unextinguished flame of inner life.

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