Beyond the Veil of Women's Lives : A Study of Select Short Stories of Banu Mustaq's Heart Lamp

Disha H. Tolia

Student of M.A. Semester IV

Department of English,

Bhakta KaviNarsinh Mehta University, Junagadh.

dishatolia03@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT :

This work looks into how women shape their sense of self in three tales by Banu Mushtaq - "*Stone Slabs for Shaista Mahal," "Fire Rain," and "Black Cobras"* - found in her book Heart Lamp. Using ideas from Simone de Beauvoir's *"The Second Sex"*, it explores female identity through an existential feminist view. Instead of relying on numbers or stats, the approach digs deep into texts with careful reading. Her concept of woman as "the Other" opens paths to understanding inequality. At play is also the tension between being stuck in routine roles versus reaching beyond them. Patriarchal setups come under scrutiny too, especially how they hold power inside Muslim homes today across India. Oppression shows up quietly but persistently throughout these narratives. Looking closer shows how each story places women outside the center, always tied to men. Though praised in big emotional scenes, the woman in *"Stone Slabs for Shaista Mahal"* ends her life worn down by motherhood duties, soon swapped out for someone younger - showing she was never meant to last. Over in *"Fire Rain"*, what should belong to a sister gets blocked by her brother's control, even though rules say otherwise, laying bare how money ties keep women bound. Meanwhile, *"Black Cobras"* peels back group displays of faith to show quiet abandonment at home - the religious leader looks brave to crowds while his own go hungry. These tales line up with Beauvoir's idea: girls aren't made weak by nature, they're shaped that way through habits, lack of resources, and swallowed beliefs passed down. Together, the plots tear open the space between acting loving, holy, righteous - and what actually happens behind closed doors where women bear the weight.

KEYWORDS :

BanuMushtaq, Feminism, Gender Oppression, Heart Lamp, The Other, Women

I. INTRODUCTION :

In recent time , around the world, women are fighting for basic fairness. From places like Afghanistan to the U.S. , laws were rolling back and freedom won after long struggles - blocking abortion care, shutting doors on schooling for girls, limiting women's voices in public roles and etc.. Even though India's constitution says everyone is equal, daily life still bends under old male-dominated rules where private choices turn into silent battles over power and control. It's inside these quiet tensions that stories matter most - not just telling lives as they're lived, but revealing who gets seen, heard, or erased altogether. What we read doesn't only mirror society - it helps decide what feels normal, acceptable, invisible when it comes to being a woman today. In 2025, Banu Mushtaq stepped into global view after her book *"Heart Lamp"* - a set of tales translated from Kannada to English by Deepa Bhasthi - landed on the International Booker shortlist. Suddenly eyes turned toward a voice that had quietly shaped stories about Muslim women in Karnataka for years. Her pages stores struggle what someone calls a sharp look at power inside one community, showing how women move through spaces narrowed by male control, rigid beliefs and lack of money. Twelve pieces make up this volume, each holding steady on women who face down deep-rooted suppression woven into home life and group norms. Far from painting these figures as helpless or reduced to symbols, Mushtaq crafts stubborn, strong individuals pushing back against unfairness. They claim space not always through shouts but through stillness, sideways moves, fleeting breaks that shift something real.Look at how those portrayals take shape. Feminist movement got huge strength by the publication of "The Second Sex" by Simone-de-Beauvoir. Beauvoir writes, *"Change your life today. Don't gamble on the future, act now, without delay."*(Beauvoir) Many women face an identity crisis: a profound uncertainty regarding "who they are." Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex" stands out here - its ideas shifted feminist thought deeply, still echo now. Being a woman isn't something handed down by body parts, she says instead it gets built over time through societal pressure and male-led systems. She labels women as "the Other," frames life paths as stuck in routine versus reaching outward, questions marriage like it's forced labor - all useful ways to see why female roles stay weakened around the world. Men name what human means, then slot women beside them, never on their own terms. That idea - that identity forms only through connection to men - fits closely with Mushtaq's figures, whose lives unfold through fathers, spouses, brothers, sons - not personal aims or dreams.Looking closely at three tales from Heart Lamp - *"Stone Slabs for Shaista Mahal","Fire Rain"* and *"Black Cobras"* - this study applies ideas from Simone de Beauvoir's "*The Second Sex"*. Though different in plot, each opens space for thinking about how women are positioned under male-dominated systems. One story follows a woman praised in life with poetic devotion, yet worn down by endless childbearing, then swiftly set aside when she passes; another man takes a new bride without pause. Her fate suggests something stark: value tied only to service leaves little room for personhood. In another tale, a sister claims inheritance as allowed by Islamic rules, but her brother blocks it anyway, showing how custom often overrides written rights. Power lives in practice, not just law. Then there is the custodian hailed for burying a stranger with dignity, while back home he ignores his ill son and strained household. Public virtue means little when private care collapses. Each account peels back layers on structures that shape women's lives quietly, firmly, without fanfare.

These tales together reveal something key about how Beauvoir sees women - not just as different but cast into the role of the Other, tied inseparably to men even while shaped by that bond. Because sex-based division isn't like class or race hierarchies; instead, it forms what she calls an "original Mitsein," a shared existence so deep that stepping away from it isn't really possible. This closeness makes domination stickier, messier - built on dependence where control blends with cooperation. In Mushtaq's work, such tension comes alive through characters who absorb social rules yet push back against them. They act, make choices, carve out space - always inside limits handed down long before they were born. What gets passed along isn't only pain and restriction, but also quiet ways of enduring, surviving, slipping through.What makes this study matter isn't just its place in talking about books - it reaches into real debates on fairness between genders in today's India. Looking closely at Mushtaq's tales reveals a split: what people pretend - love, faith, justice - and what women actually endure every day. This work adds weight to discussions already happening around Muslim women's lives, how religious rules get explained, and whether different groups of women can stand together despite differences. The point made by Feminism in India rings clear: her writing pushes back against rigid traditional views while also questioning shallow Western ideas that paint Muslim women only as helpless figures needing rescue from outside. Her fiction leans toward change coming from within communities,

driven by one hard truth - "injustice was the everyday staple for women of all communities." Something often missing in past work gets attention here. Though others looked at abuse, quiet defiance, religious pretense in “Heart Lamp” , nobody used Beauvoir’s ideas on womanhood like this before. This piece moves differently - first, it watches how women get cast behind men’s gaze in each tale. Next comes a look at stuckness against reaching out - the push and pull shaping their days. Then follows a peek into ties that bind: wedlock, motherhood, money reliance - all shaping limits placed on women. Lastly, small acts that break through emerge, brief but real sparks under tight control. Looking close, Mushtaq’s words show deep patterns of male rule - not just anywhere, yet rooted firmly in South India’s Muslim settings - and so, old thoughts by Beauvoir still fit, still matter now, far beyond where they started.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW :

Existing scholarship on Banu Mushtaq's *“Heart Lamp”* has examined the collection through several key thematic lenses. Studies focusing on silence as resistance argue that female characters employ strategic silence not as passivity but as deliberate defiance, enabling them to assert agency within constrained circumstances. Research exploring intersections of class, gender, and religious authority reveals how overlapping forms of oppression—poverty, patriarchal control, and institutional religious power—compound the subordination of Muslim women in rural Karnataka. Islamic feminist readings demonstrate how Mushtaq separates authentic faith from distorted power plays, showing religion becoming ground for resistance rather than mere oppression. Trauma-focused studies examine individual psychological responses to domestic violence, betrayal, and social exclusion, while existential readings apply Beauvoir's framework to argue that women's identities are socially constructed through imposed roles that block paths to authentic selfhood. Spatial analyses investigate how domestic spaces become sites of both control and quiet resistance. Despite this rich body of work, a significant gap remains: no study has systematically applied Simone de Beauvoir's core concepts—woman as "the Other," the dialectic of immanence versus transcendence, and the critique of marriage as enslavement—across multiple stories in the collection. Existing scholarship remains largely thematic, focusing on description rather than sustained philosophical analysis. The present study addresses this gap by conducting a Beauvoirian analysis of three stories to demonstrate how Mushtaq's narratives collectively illuminate universal mechanisms of patriarchal oppression while remaining grounded in the specific cultural context of South Indian Muslim communities.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES :

- To analyze how women are portrayed as "the Other" in Mushtaq's stories.
- To examine the contrast between women's confinement (immanence) and men's freedom (transcendence).
- To explore how marriage, motherhood, and economic dependence shape women's oppression.
- To identify moments of female resistance and agency in the narratives.

IV. METHODOLOGY :

Looking closely at words and silences shapes this project, drawing on Simone de Beauvoir’s ideas about existence and womanhood found in *“The Second Sex”*. Through slow readings of character, tone, image, and speech, it explores stories by BanuMushtaq from her collection Heart Lamp - specifically “Stone Slabs for Shaista Mahal” “Fire Rain” and “Black Cobras”. These tales stand out because they show daily life for women under male authority in Muslim homes across Karnataka. Beauvoir’s view that women are cast as “the Other” runs through the work, along with her thoughts on limited roles versus full self-expression, plus how marriage and childbearing can enforce control. One goal here is to see how girls and women get placed outside normal human experience. Another looks into why so many remain stuck in narrow domestic spaces without paths to growth or freedom. A third considers money reliance and marital structures as tools keeping power uneven. Yet another searches for small acts of pushback, signs of will, glimpses where someone claims space. By working step by step like this, the approach links old theory to new voices in Indian fiction today. Surprisingly, even now, existential feminism holds up when studying different cultures’ ways of restricting gender.

V. A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF BANU MUSTAQ AND HER STORY COLLECTION :

Banu Mushtaq (born 1948) is a renowned Indian writer, activist and lawyer from Karnataka who writes in the Kannada language. Emerging from a Muslim family in Hassan, she defied community expectations by pursuing higher education and marrying for love at age 26. Her writing career began in the 1970s within the Bandaya Sahitya movement—a progressive protest literary circle that challenged caste and class oppression in Karnataka.Mushtaq's work as a journalist for Lankesh Patrike and her legal practice deeply inform her fiction, which consistently advocates for women's rights and social justice. In 2000, she faced severe backlash, including a fatwa and an attempted knife attack, for publicly supporting women's right to enter mosques—an experience that reflects the courage underlying her literary voice. Her contributions have earned her the Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award (1999) and the Daana Chintamani Attimabbe Award.Heart Lamp: Selected Stories (2025), translated by DeepaBhasthi, is the first full-length English translation of Mushtaq's work . The collection brings together twelve short stories written between 1990 and 2023, selected from her six Kannada anthologies . The stories center on the lives of Muslim women and girls in southern India, exploring their struggles against patriarchal oppression, religious orthodoxy, economic dependence, and caste hierarchies. Mushtaq's narratives balance unflinching social critique with dry humour and warmth, portraying characters who endure, resist, and survive within constrained circumstances . In May 2025, Heart Lamp made history by winning the International Booker Prize—the first short story collection and the first Kannada-language book to receive this honour, with the prize shared equally between Mushtaq and translator DeepaBhasthi .

VI. EXPLORING WOMEN'S LIVES IN SELECT SHORT STORIES:

This section deals with the close reading of chosen tales from the short story collection of BanuMustaq – "Heart Lamp". Short stories are *"Stone Slabs for Shaista Mahal"*, *"Fire Rain"* and *"Black Cobras"*. Researcher has used the theoretical concept of Simon de Beauvoir's *"Second Sex"* where women has been described as "The Other". Each story offers a view of patriarchal Muslim households of Karnataka. Here women appears again, set apart, placed outside what is taken as normal. Men move freely through worlds built on action and choice, whereas her path loops inward, shaped by marriage, motherhood, tied hands. Yet quiet defiance flickers - sometimes loud, often hidden - where women push back in ways small and sharp. Each tale unfolds on its own, shaped by distinct voices and tensions between people. Still, something connects them: a pattern beneath the surface, repeating across lives, revealing limits that stretch beyond any single story. A stone path meant for love leads nowhere in Shaista's tale. Instead of romance, there is silence - her body worn down by duty, then replaced without pause. Iftikhar speaks big dreams into the air; meanwhile, she breathes quietly until she cannot. His plans for palaces which vanish when real life demands something harder than words. She dies doing what women are told matters most. Another girl takes her place before dust settles. Usman holds power because he says so. Two sisters ask only what rules promise them. They cite old texts, clear laws, fair shares - but he twists meaning like wet cloth. Faith bends where money sits. What protects graves does nothing for living daughters. Brothers guard a land tighter than scripture. Outside, a man fights to bury a stranger with honor. Inside, his son fades unseen. A woman works beyond daylight while grief piles up. Holiness shows itself in crowds, never at home. Respect arrives loud at funerals, never at sickbeds. Each story turns around the same axis: men shape truth until it fits their hands. Women stand inside roles too tight to move. These moments belong to one region, one faith, yet feel familiar elsewhere. Power rarely changes face - it just finds new walls to hide behind.

VI.I EXPLORING WOMEN'S LIVES IN *"STONE SLABS FOR SHAISTA MAHAL"*:

This story explores the life of Shaista who is wife of Iftikhar and mother of 7 children with carrying another one in her womb. The story has been narrated by Zeenat who is young and newlywed girl who moved to KrishnarajaSagara Dam Project with her husband Mujahid.The story unfolds through her observant eyes as she and Mujahid visit Iftikhar Ahmed and his wife Shaista in Belagola. Iftikhar proudly shows off his garden, which he planted entirely for Shaista. The garden features guava trees with swings, jasmine vines, rose varieties, and Anab-e-Shahi grapes. All of these reflect his love for her. He boldly claims that if he were an emperor, he would build a palace that would outshine the Taj Mahal and call it "Shaista Mahal." However, Mujahid points out that the Taj Mahal is a tomb for a dead wife. This starts a troubling conversation about love, death, and the idea of being replaceable. Shaista shares her grandmother's wisdom: when a wife dies, it is like an elbow injury for the husband—an immediate, sharp pain, but without any lasting wound, scar, or memory. The story follows Shaista's

pregnancy, the birth of a seventh childand her death shortly after. Within forty days, Iftikhar marries a girl "not more than eighteen years old." The narrative ends with Zeenat confronting Iftikhar, asking him not to repeat his promises of eternal love to his new wife. She watches Asifa—Shaista's eldest daughter—holding the baby and caring for her younger siblings, her eyes filled with tears.

Viewed through the prism of Simone de Beauvoir's *"The Second Sex"*, this narrative underscores the concept of women as *"The Other"*. Beauvoir argues that "humanity is male, and man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself; she is not considered an independent being." Shaista exists only through Iftikhar's gaze and statements—the garden is for her, the dream palace carries her name, yet she herself remains silent and passive. She is defined by his love rather than by her own ambitions. Beauvoir writes that woman is "the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other." Iftikhar's grand romantic gestures mask the underlying inequality: his love glorifies himself as the devoted husband while Shaista is merely the object of his feelings, never the subject of her own life. Her role is to accept his devotion, bear his children, and run his household—functions that Beauvoir sees as confining women to the repetitive world of domesticity and reproduction, which creates nothing new and allows no growth.

The story starkly confirms Beauvoir's view of marriage as a form of enslavement and women's bodies as objects for reproduction. Shaista dies after her seventh childbirth, illustrating Beauvoir's idea of women's alienation through reproduction: "inhabited by another who is nourished by her substance, the female is both herself and other than herself during the whole gestation period." Her death reveals the emptiness of Iftikhar's romantic claims—what Beauvoir calls the "myth of the Eternal Feminine," where man projects his dreams onto women while negating their independent reality. Most importantly, Shaista's quick replacement by a younger wife shows Beauvoir's insight that women are interchangeable objects fulfilling roles rather than unique individuals. As the narrator Zeenat sadly notes, Iftikhar's "eternal and intense love" becomes meaningless when faced with his need for someone "to look after the children." The story concludes with Asifa, Shaista's daughter, now taking on the maternal role for her siblings—visually confirming Beauvoir's idea that women's subordination continues across generations, with mothers passing on both oppression and resilience to their daughters.

VI.II EXPLORING WOMEN'S LIVES IN "FIRE RAIN":

In the centre of this story is Mutawalli Usman Saheb who is religious key figure and authorities person who manages the mosque and all issues in the community. Story opens up with furiousness of Usman Saheb, who became very angry on his wife Arifa and his son Ansar as they both were sleeping in the living room. Ansar was very sick and Arifa had stayed up whole night to take care of him but Usman Saheb was busy with his own work only and not having care of his son. Fire grows inside him when he sees his younger sister Jameela walk in, followed by her husband - here they are, ready to claim what Islam says as she deserves from their father's estate. Though calm, her words carry weight: *"Brother, this portion belongs to me by divine rule, not yours to give or take - it comes from faith, not your labor."* Another sibling appears too - Sakeena, widowed, stitching clothes each day to feed her kids - not here for land or money, only whispering hope that he might open a door for her son somewhere. Out beyond the house, tension rises - the body of Nisar, a painter once accused of swindling the mosque, dug up by officers and laid beneath foreign soil among Hindus. Without delay, the caretaker steps forward, pulling strings to dig up the grave, restore dignity, gather coins from neighbors, wrap the dead properly, then lead a long line of mourners through dust and silence. Out front, people cheer him. Inside, silence greets a sick child gasping under thin sheets. While crowds shout thanks, one woman stays awake, counting breaths through endless nights. A man walks back proud, keys jingling like celebration bells. Then - a voice breaks the joy: "You should have been here." His fingers go numb. Water spills across the floor. The noise outside fades fast. Cold tiles swallow every drop. He stares ahead. Nothing moves but shadows.

Looking through Simone de Beauvoir's *"The Second Sex"*, this tale shows how women are boxed into routine roles under male-dominated systems. Not exactly slaves, but never equals either - that's how she sees women next to men, according to her words. In "Fire Rain," the women live only inside that looped space of daily upkeep - feeding, cleaning, watching over others. Night by night, Arifa stays awake nursing her ill child, then moves straight into cooking, sweeping, folding clothes, thinking without speaking. As Beauvoir puts it, such tasks trap a woman in endless cycles - same actions today as yesterday,

unchanged across generations, bringing no real shift. Her effort goes unseen, unnamed, still keeps everything standing. While the mutawalli steps out into speeches and decisions, claiming spiritual authority, she remains behind. When she softly mentions scripture about inheritance rights for sisters, he cuts her off fast: *"Quiet now. Get back to what you're supposed to be doing."*

Beauvoir saw how money ties keep women held back, shaping their place in society. Heading to her brother's home, Jameela walks not to claim but to ask - her words softened into a plea. Sakeena stands on the porch with others she does not know, touching her brother's feet though pride lives in her spine, calling him "Bhaisaab," never "Anna" - a shift meant to win grace through humility. Men land steadier work, earn more pay, climb faster when conditions seem fair, according to Beauvoir, who called these divides near caste-like in strength. Power over land, faith, and influence sits with the mutawalli; his sisters breathe only as long as he allows it. Her husband pushes Jamelee to speak up, shaping her voice for what he wants - he uses her like a bridge where men trade control, never seeing her as real on her own. From a saying in Kannada that Arifa remembers comes the name of the tale: *"When the rightful one grows angry, embers pour from sky."* Women hand this truth forward - the harm done when fairness slips away brings ruin no one escapes. The mutawalli stands tall at Nisar's burial, showing strength and faith before all - yet inside his home, his child lies broken, weakened by unseen force. That sickness hints the fiery downfall foretold by old women has landed exactly where it was promised. Through Beauvoir's eyes, the gap cracks wide - men play roles in daylight while women carry silent truths too heavy to hide.

VI.III EXPLORING WOMEN'S LIVES IN "BLACK COBRAS":

One morning, Usman Saheb rises early for prayer, already annoyed. In the living room lies his wife Arifa, asleep beside their ill son Ansar - she never left the boy's side through the night. Into this quiet chaos steps Jameela, his youngest sister, along with her husband, pushing hard on claims to inheritance allowed by scripture. Their voices rise just as others start arriving. First comes Sakeena, widowed and soft-spoken, asking only that he open one door for her son in the job market. Later shuffles in Saabjaan, bent slightly with age, needing money - forty thousand rupees - for his daughter's marriage feast. One after another they appear, each carrying troubles too heavy alone, each expecting answers from him. Daylight stretches long while requests pile like stones. Right then, Dawood - his closest aide - walks in with word about Nisar's body, a painter who'd swindled the mosque years ago, dug up and tossed into a Hindu graveyard by cops. Spotting a chance to shine, the mutawalli jumps at leading a public show - unearthing the remains, reburial under Islamic rites, money pouring in, crowds swelling behind a massive funeral march. Yet behind closed doors, things rot quietly: his boy Ansar burns through days with untreated meningitis, while Arifa holds it together without complaint, fear stitched tight inside her chest. Later that evening he struts back home wrapped in applause, only to hear the child is fading fast - the moment the truth lands, a glass drops from his fingers, shattering on the floor like everything else he thought was solid. Above it all, crows spin slow loops in his thoughts, dark feathers shifting to hints of violet, green, red when light hits just so - ghosts of regret settling deep.

From Simone de Beauvoir's *"The Second Sex"* comes a sharp view - women are stuck in routines that never change, shaped by systems where they appear only as secondary figures, unseen despite their efforts. Take Arifa. She lives inside those limits: cooking, cleaning, caring, circling the same tasks like seasons returning without mark. As Beauvoir puts it, such work chains a person to endless return - no invention, just upkeep across years on end. Meanwhile, the mutawalli steps outside, into spaces loud with doing: leading prayer, settling quarrels, guiding funerals, speaking with officials. Behind closed doors, she stays with illness, hunger, silence, small duties piling one atop another. What she gives matters deeply - still, it goes unnoticed. Even when words come softly from her lips about justice written long ago, demanding fair treatment, he answers cold: "Be quiet and carry on." Marriage, says Beauvoir, often turns wives into bound workers, loyal helpers whose worth is measured solely by service rendered - tied not to self but to others' needs. Beauvoir points out how money shapes power between genders. Not just unequal pay, but entire systems tilt toward men. When Jameela walks to her brother's home, it isn't a visit - it's a negotiation where law means nothing without permission. Her claim sounds polite, shaped like gratitude instead of justice. Sakeena stands barefoot on stone, surrounded by people who barely know her, lowering herself slowly. She says "Bhaisaab," not "Father," though blood ties bind them both. That word choice matters. It carries weight. Submission becomes strategy when food, shelter, safety hang in balance. Men land steadier work. They earn more. Opportunities open faster. These

aren't accidents. Power stacks up before birth. The mutawalli holds keys - to land, prayer spaces, influence. His sisters wait. Their lives stretch only as far as his mercy allows. Her husband makes Jamelee speak the words, shaping her voice into a tool for his own gain - he turns her into someone who only matters through him, just as Beauvoir describes when she speaks of women defined by men. From deep inside, Arifa whispers a wish for her spouse: may dark snakes wrap tight around you - an unspoken pain turned into quiet defiance, all she can offer while trapped in silence. When the mutawalli buries Nisar's body before everyone, it looks like strength, faith, control - yet behind closed doors, his child lies broken, showing how fate often answers pride with loss. What women know in their bones, without saying much, seems true now - that punishment, long promised in stillness, has found its mark after all. Through Beauvoir's eyes, the tale shows how empty such public acts feel next to the real weight carried in women's bodies, their needs ignored, their voices buried. Last thing we notice: birds with feathers that shift under light, seen clearly only if one bothers to look - maybe, at last, he begins to grasp what was always there, unseen, undervalued.

VII. CONCLUSION:

This study looked at three tales from Banu Mustaq's "*Heart Lamp"* - *"Stone Slabs for Shaista Mahal", "Fire Rain" and "Black Cobras"* - using ideas from Simone de Beauvoir's *"The Second Sex"*. Though rooted in fiction, each story reflects real patterns women face. Instead of freedom, they move through routines shaped by others' expectations. Men act; women wait. Because marriage limits choice, lives unfold within walls both seen and unseen. One after another, their paths repeat without rise. While men reach outward, these figures stay fixed inside duties handed down. So it goes: control hides in tradition, shaping who gets to become - and who must only serve. Even in grief, Shaista lives just within Iftikhar's words - his longing shapes her more than her own life ever could. When she dies from bearing children and another girl takes her place right after, it shows how empty such romance truly is. Not unique souls but replaceable figures slide into assigned spaces, proving what Beauvoir once noted about womanhood under patriarchy. Religious power wraps tight around land ownership where women like Jameela struggle to claim what should be theirs. Though she asks, she kneels; though she resists, she begs. Sakeena ends up on the ground too, hands outstretched toward a brother who holds everything. Trapped inside four walls, Arifa handles every need without help, even though her husband speaks at meetings downtown. What she does goes unseen, what she knows gets shrugged off like dust on a shelf. Every now and then, Mushtaq shows how what people claim to believe - like true romance, faith, or guiding a community - falls apart when faced with how women actually live. Still, something shifts in each tale: Zeenat speaks her truth, Arifa bears it without words, Jameela demands justice by law, while Asifa carries weight from the past along with quiet possibility ahead. This work shows how Beauvoir's ideas still matter today when looking at women's experiences around the world. Though rooted deeply in South Indian Muslim life, Mushtaq's people reveal patterns of control common in many places. These tales do more than expose unfair systems - they show quiet strength in hardship. Words on a page become protest, speaking for those pushed to silence. A saying from Karnataka puts it sharply - when holders of right feel wronged, flames descend without warning. From each story rises that heat, refusing to let injustice pass unseen.

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