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Feminine Temporality in Banu Mushtaq's *Heart Lamp: Selected Stories*

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Abstract

South Asian Muslim women's fiction remains relatively underrepresented in Anglophone literary scholarship, particularly writing produced in Indian regional languages. This article examines Banu Mushtaq's *Heart Lamp: Selected Stories* (trans. Deepa Bhashti, 2025) to analyze how **feminine temporality is constructed and negotiated** in the everyday lives of South Asian Muslim women. Drawing on feminist temporality theory, particularly the work of **Kristeva, Freeman, and Sharma**, and feminist narratology, the study conducts close readings of selected stories from the collection. **The analysis** identifies four recurring temporal modes: waiting, bodily time, domestic repetition, and counter-temporal rupture, examining how each is structured through narrative form. **The article argues** that Mushtaq's fiction constitutes a counter-temporal literary project that resists the linear time of patriarchal and nationalist modernity by centering embodied, cyclical, and constrained temporalities. The study contributes to feminist literary scholarship on South Asian Muslim women's writing and demonstrates the relevance of feminist temporality frameworks for reading Kannada regional fiction.

Keywords: Feminist temporality; Feminist narratology; South Asian Muslim women's writing; Kannada literature in translation; Gender and time.

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Introduction

South Asian literary studies has expanded considerably in recent decades. Scholars have turned increasing attention to regional-language literatures, postcolonial feminist voices, and the intersectional dimensions of gender, religion, and class in South Asian fiction. Yet Kannada-language literature, and specifically fiction by Muslim women writing in Kannada, remains comparatively underrepresented in Anglophone scholarship. This relative absence reflects structural inequalities in literary canon formation along lines of language, religion, and gender. It also reflects a longstanding tendency within South Asian literary studies to privilege writing in Hindi, Bengali, and Urdu over Dravidian language traditions of South India.

Mushtaq's fiction is shaped by the *Bandaya Sahitya* movement, a politically engaged Kannada literary tradition of the 1970s and 1980s associated with Dalit, minority, and women's voices. As her translator Deepa Bhashthi notes, Mushtaq's work can be described by the Kannada term *bandaya*, connoting dissent and resistance [1]. Her fiction moves away from romantic plot conventions to critique patriarchy within Muslim domestic and community life in South India.

Heart Lamp: Selected Stories [1], translated by Bhashthi, brings twelve stories to a wider English-language readership. The collection centers women in domestic and crisis situations shaped by constrained temporal conditions. In these stories, time operates as a medium through which women's subordination is structured and occasionally contested.

Time is not a universal category. The ways individuals experience, measure, and are governed by time are shaped by social position, gender, class, religion, and history. Feminist theorists, including Julia Kristeva and Elizabeth Freeman, have argued that dominant temporal orders systematically devalue cyclical and bodily temporalities [2], [3]. Literary representations of time are therefore ideological. A narrative that foregrounds household tasks, bodily cycles, and waiting rather than linear progression implicitly makes a claim about whose time counts.

Despite growing scholarly attention to South Asian women's fiction, Banu Mushtaq's work has received limited sustained academic attention in English-language scholarship, particularly prior to the 2025 translation of *Heart Lamp*. This reflects the linguistic inaccessibility of her Kannada originals to most Anglophone scholars, but also reveals a broader gap: the under-theorization of South Indian Muslim women's literary production within feminist postcolonial studies. Furthermore, while feminist temporality theory has been richly developed in Euro-American contexts, its application to South Asian Muslim

women's short fiction remains limited. This article addresses these gaps by bringing feminist temporality frameworks to the analysis of Mushtaq's fiction.

The study is guided by three questions. How does Mushtaq's fiction represent the temporal experience of Muslim women in South India? In what ways do her narratives encode cyclical, domestic, bodily, and waiting-based temporalities as gendered counter-temporal modes? How do these temporal representations participate in broader feminist and postcolonial critiques of patriarchal and nationalist temporal orders?

This article argues that *Heart Lamp* constitutes a sustained literary engagement with feminine temporality. Through structures of repetition, waiting, domestic rhythm, and embodied time, Mushtaq constructs a counter-temporal aesthetic that resists linear models of patriarchal and national modernity. Her fiction foregrounds the temporal density of women's everyday lives as a site of both constraint and critical resistance.

This analysis does not posit a universal or homogeneous feminine temporality but examines how specific narrative constructions produce gendered temporal experiences within particular socio-cultural, religious, and class contexts. In doing so, it contributes to feminist temporality scholarship and to emerging Kannada feminist literary studies by foregrounding temporality as a key analytical category.

Literature Review

The theorization of time as a gendered category is most influentially articulated in Kristeva's essay *Women's Time* [2]. Kristeva distinguishes between linear, historical time and cyclical, bodily time. Although critiqued for biological essentialism, this distinction remains central to analyses of gendered temporal experience. Freeman [3] extends this framework through the concept of chrononormativity, highlighting how temporal regimes discipline bodies into normative life sequences and mark deviations as aberrant.

Sharma [4] further develops a materialist account of temporality, emphasizing the unequal distribution and management of time across social positions. Braidotti [5] offers a process-oriented alternative through nomadic subjectivity, rejecting linear developmental models in favor of fluid, non-linear modes of becoming. While these frameworks emerge from distinct theoretical traditions, this study adopts a pragmatic analytical alignment. Kristeva's model is used heuristically to identify representations of cyclical and embodied time, while Freeman's and Sharma's approaches provide a critical lens for analyzing how such temporalities are normatively regulated and materially distributed

within narrative structures. At the same time, they remain largely grounded in Euro-American contexts and do not sufficiently address the intersection of gender, religion, and regional literary form, indicating a gap in their application to South Asian Muslim women's fiction. Collectively, these frameworks conceptualize temporality as a site of gendered power.

Feminist scholarship identifies waiting as a gendered temporal mode structured by asymmetrical power relations. Waiting is understood not as passivity but as temporal labor, involving the suspension of one's own agency in deference to others' schedules. Wajcman [6] shows that women experience greater time poverty due to fragmentation, interruptibility, and limited temporal autonomy. This renders women's time structurally available to external demands.

Lefebvre [7] conceptualizes social life as organized through repetitive rhythms. Domestic labor, structured through recurring tasks and routines, exemplifies how temporal patterns regulate everyday life. Feminist extensions of this framework emphasize how such rhythms are unevenly imposed and experienced. Wright [8] links temporality to the production of gendered bodies as expendable. Her analysis highlights how bodily time is shaped by systems that render women's labor finite and replaceable. Together, these approaches frame waiting, repetition, and bodily temporality as interconnected dimensions of gendered temporal inequality.

Postcolonial feminist scholarship has examined the positioning of Muslim women within both Western Orientalist discourse and South Asian patriarchal structures. Abu-Lughod [9] critiques homogenizing representations of Muslim women as passive victims and calls for attention to situated forms of agency and constraint. Mahmood [10] complicates liberal notions of agency by framing religious practice as an ethical mode of self-formation rather than simple submission or resistance. Recent scholarship shows how gender, religion, and power shape Muslim women's agency in non-Western contexts [11]. Similarly, analyses of contemporary Pakistani fiction highlight how female characters navigate social expectations and patriarchal structures [12].

Chatterjee [13] argues that nationalist discourse assigns women to an 'inner' domestic sphere, producing a division between public and private domains that also structures temporal experience. Sangari and Vaid [14] demonstrate how such gendered roles are historically constructed across regions and communities. Loomba [15] situates gender within broader colonial and postcolonial power formations, highlighting how literary representation is shaped by these legacies. These frameworks foreground the intersections of gender, religion, and history, while leaving the temporal dimensions of these structures comparatively underexamined. Religious practices such as prayer

cycles and ritual observance constitute a further temporal regime that structures everyday life alongside domestic routines. Attending to this dimension is particularly relevant for Muslim women's fiction, where religious time intersects with – and often intensifies – the gendered distribution of temporal power.

Scholarship on Muslim women's writing in South Asia has expanded, yet regional-language traditions, particularly Kannada, remain underexamined. Afzal-Khan [16] examines how Indo-English fiction negotiates the tensions between colonial literary inheritance and local cultural contexts. Ahmed [17] analyzes how Muslim women writers navigate secular and religious frameworks within specific socio-political settings.

While this scholarship foregrounds negotiation, identity, and representation, it focuses primarily on Anglophone or diasporic contexts. Recent work has also examined gendered narrative strategies in contemporary fiction within applied and pedagogical contexts [18], though without sustained attention to temporality as a structuring principle. Regional-language Muslim women's writing in South India, particularly in Kannada, remains critically underexplored.

The formal analysis of narrative time is foundational to narratology. Genette [19] distinguishes between story time and discourse time, and develops the categories of order, duration, and frequency to explain how narrative structures temporal experience. Lanser [20] extends narratology through a feminist lens, showing how narrative voice and authority are shaped by gender. Warhol and Herndl [21] further situate feminist criticism at the intersection of formal and ideological analysis. Charles E. May [22] argues that the short story's compression privileges singular moments over linear development, while Hanson [23] emphasizes its role as a site of formal experimentation outside dominant literary traditions. Collectively, these perspectives position narrative form, particularly short fiction, as a key site for analyzing non-linear and constrained temporalities.

Recent scholarship on *Heart Lamp: Selected Stories* has begun to develop following its English translation and increased global visibility, particularly after winning the International Booker Prize 2025 [24]. Existing studies primarily adopt feminist and postcolonial frameworks. They focus on gendered oppression, identity, and resistance within South Asian Muslim contexts. For instance, Sivaranjani and Rajeswari [25] read the collection as a critique of patriarchal structures, emphasizing women's resilience within culturally embedded constraints. Similarly, Sattar [26] analyzes the title story through a subaltern framework, highlighting silencing and the limited forms of agency available to women under patriarchal authority. Other readings attend to symbolic registers.

Solanke [27], for example, interprets recurring motifs such as light and darkness as expressions of interiority and gendered subjectivity. Early international reviews also note the collection's attention to domestic labor, emotional endurance, and everyday forms of resilience [28]. While this emerging body of work establishes *Heart Lamp* as a significant site for feminist and postcolonial inquiry, it remains largely thematic in focus. Limited attention has been given to narrative form and temporality as structuring principles. This gap provides the basis for the present study.

Across these strands of scholarship, temporality emerges as a key site of gendered power, and narrative form as a critical medium for its representation. However, two limitations remain. First, feminist temporality frameworks are largely developed within Euro-American theoretical contexts and have not been systematically applied to South Asian literary texts. Second, scholarship on Muslim women's writing has focused predominantly on Anglophone and diasporic contexts, with limited attention to regional-language traditions and their formal specificities. As a result, the intersection of gendered temporality, religion, and narrative form in South Asian Muslim women's vernacular fiction remains insufficiently theorized. This article addresses these gaps by integrating feminist temporality theory with feminist narratology to analyze a contemporary Kannada short story collection in translation.

Method

This study adopts a theoretically informed close reading grounded in feminist narratology to examine how feminine temporality is constructed in *Heart Lamp: Selected Stories*. The analysis is interpretive and text-centered. This interpretive approach is appropriate for literary analysis, where meaning is generated through narrative form, representation, and theoretical engagement rather than empirical measurement.

Feminist narratology provides the primary analytical framework [20], [21]. The study examines four dimensions: narrative duration, frequency, temporal order, and focalization, to identify how narrative form encodes gendered temporal experience. Narrative duration is used to assess how textual attention is distributed across domestic, bodily, and external events. Frequency identifies patterns of repetition. Temporal order examines deviations from linear chronology. Focalization analyzes whose temporal perspective structures the narrative.

The analysis is organized around four analytically derived thematic clusters: waiting, bodily time, domestic repetition, and counter-temporal rupture. These categories are not treated as discrete or exhaustive but as overlapping interpretive lenses that emerge through sustained engagement with the text and

are informed by feminist temporality theory. The analysis proceeds through iterative close reading of the selected stories, identifying recurring temporal patterns, narrative pacing, and moments of disruption. These textual features are then interpreted through feminist temporality frameworks to examine how narrative form mediates gendered temporal experience.

Stories are selected based on their explicit engagement with female subjectivity, temporal experience, and narrative variation across the collection, ensuring analytical coverage of different temporal configurations. The analysis focuses on six stories: "Heart Lamp," "Be a Woman Once, Oh Lord!," "Stone Slabs for Shaista Mahal," "Fire Rain," "The Shroud," and "Soft Whispers." The selection of six stories enables focused analysis while ensuring coverage of temporal configurations representative of the collection's broader narrative concerns.

This study is limited to the English translation of *Heart Lamp* and cannot examine the formal properties of Mushtaq's Kannada originals. The analysis therefore treats the translated text as an interpretive mediation rather than a transparent rendering of the source. Observations on narrative pacing, syntax, and diction are made with this limitation in view and are understood as features of the translated text. The study is further limited to the twelve stories in this collection and does not address Mushtaq's other published work. These limitations indicate directions for future research, particularly studies engaging the Kannada originals and a broader corpus.

Result and Discussion

Waiting as Gendered Temporal Mode

In the selected stories, waiting operates as a dominant temporal mode in Mushtaq's fiction. It structures narrative pacing, spatial positioning, and character experience. This expanded narrative attention reflects the temporal inequality theorized by Sharma [4].

The title story "Heart Lamp" opens with Mehrun's arrival at her parents' house. She stands at the threshold of the family home in which she was raised, unable to enter without permission. The sentence structure of the opening scene enacts threshold time: "Mehrun had barely moved the half-closed door, just putting a foot inside, when her father, who was lying on the divan cot in the drawing room, and her eldest brother, who was discussing something with him in a low voice, both stopped talking and looked at her" [1, p. 102]. The narrative pauses to sequence each reaction, prolonging Mehrun's suspended entry. She has traveled three hours alone with an infant. The journey, which took the whole

morning, occupies no narrative time. The moment of waiting at the threshold occupies a full paragraph.

Freeman's [3] concept of chrononormativity clarifies this asymmetry. Mehrun's autonomous journey, the assertion of her own temporal agency, is narratively compressed to nothing. The threshold time, in which her self-determination is suspended and awaits the authorization of male family members, is dilated into significant narrative duration. This asymmetry extends chrononormative logic into narrative form: autonomous time is compressed, while time awaiting male sanction is extended.

The waiting extends into the domestic space. When her brothers decide to return her to her husband's house, Mehrun does not move. The narrative dwells in her stillness: "Mehrun did not stir from where she sat. Her mother and her younger sisters took turns begging her to eat, but she did not put a crumb of food or a drop of water in her mouth" [1, p. 107]. This is an act of temporal refusal. Mehrun has been told her time is not her own, that she must manage the household, cook lunch, and present her husband's return as normal. Her bodily stillness is a refusal to perform the temporal management expected of her. It is, as Braidotti [5] suggests, a nomadic gesture: a small and costly assertion of temporal agency within a structure designed to eliminate it.

In "The Shroud," waiting operates differently but is equally structurally central. Yaseen Bua, a poor widow who works as a domestic laborer in wealthier Muslim households, waits patiently through an entire festive day for the opportunity to speak to Shaziya, the Hajj-departing mistress of the house. The narrative renders her waiting in precise domestic detail: "Yaseen Bua kept on washing vessels, cleaning the plates, sweeping, waiting her turn" [1, p. 174]. The accumulation of domestic verbs frames waiting as labor. Waiting is inseparable from ongoing domestic labor. Her temporal experience is one of continuous service oriented toward the deferred hope of a single moment when she may speak her private wish.

When that moment finally comes, at eleven o'clock at night, it is organized entirely by Shaziya's exhaustion and convenience: "when a tired Shaziya finally sat on the sofa and stretched her legs out on the soft carpet, she saw Yaseen Bua's shadow near the living room door" [1, p. 174]. The contrast between Shaziya's stretched-out, resting body and Bua's shadow at the threshold reproduces the spatial and temporal inequality between the two women in a single image. Shaziya's time, which has been filled with greetings, gifts, and social performance, is now finally available to itself. Bua's time, which has been spent serving others, is still not available for her own desires. She must wait at the edge of someone else's repose.

Bodily Time and Its Erasure

Feminist temporality theory, particularly Wright's account of the disposable body [8], is illuminated in concentrated form in the story "Heart Lamp." Mehrun's body is central to the narrative not as a site of her own experience but as a temporal object measured by her husband Inayat's desire and assessed against his boredom. The narrator, slipping into a dissociative third person, reflects: "her face had become wrinkled, and the veins on her hands stood out, and there was a thin shadow under her eyes, her heels had cracked, and dirt had settled permanently under her chipped, uneven nails, her hair had thinned - and she had noticed none of this" [1, p. 111]. The catalogue of bodily change is framed through Mehrun's lack of self-perception. Her self-estrangement is itself a product of the labor that has consumed her.

Inayat, however, has noticed. His comparison of Mehrun to his own mother, "You are like my mother" [1, p. 111], is the moment when her bodily time, the time of reproductive and domestic labor, is retrospectively converted into grounds for dismissal. The body that bore and nursed his children, that cracked its heels in daily labor, is now coded as maternal and therefore desexualized. The scene can be read through Wright's concept of the "disposable woman": the female body whose labor has produced value for the household is discarded once it no longer produces the specific pleasure the husband desires [8].

The contrast with the nurse, who "was sliding down her thirties, and was ready to do anything, anything at all, to secure her future" [1, p. 111], underlines the temporal logic. The nurse's body is at the right temporal moment, young enough to be desired but experienced enough to be strategically motivated. Mehrun's body is past its moment by the calculation that matters to Inayat. This temporal logic situates Mehrun's body within a chrononormative framework in which value is assigned to specific life stages and withdrawn once those stages are exceeded.

"Be a Woman Once, Oh Lord!" extends this analysis of bodily time to its most radical formulation. Written as a direct address to God, the story is narrated by a woman who has had no temporal autonomy from the moment of her birth. Her body is placed under male authority through marriage while she is still a child or adolescent, and her reproductive labor begins before she can fully understand it. She observes: "I had to set down roots in another's front yard, grow new shoots there, bloom there. He was getting attached, while my identity was melting away. Even my name got lost. Do you know what my new name was? His wife" [1, p. 204]. The botanical metaphors are significant. The narrator's temporality is figured as growth, natural and cyclical, but redirected into

another's soil. Her identity is not destroyed but displaced. She continues to grow, but in a direction and at a rate determined by another.

The bodily time of pregnancy and lactation is figured as a site of both constraint and remarkable power: "his hunger was great too. I was on the road to becoming a mother myself but I stood in a corner constantly looking back down the road to my maternal home" [1, p. 206]. The pregnant body here occupies two temporal positions simultaneously. It moves forward into the future of the child about to be born, and it looks back toward the maternal home from which the narrator has been severed. This is the doubled temporality of the maternal body: simultaneously prospective and retrospective, oriented both toward birth and toward loss. Kristeva's cyclical time [2] and Freeman's chrononormativity [3] are both visible here: the narrator inhabits cyclical bodily time, but that time is organized by the linear demands of a patriarchal household that has no interest in her grief.

When the narrator is hospitalized for surgery, her husband demands her gold chain, which was forged from her own mother's wedding gold. His demand arrives precisely when her body is most vulnerable: "I could feel no touch, no memories were left, no relationships could pierce her [sic]" [1, p. 210]. The timing is not incidental. It is an act of temporal exploitation, a seizure of the last material connection to her mother performed at the moment when her physical incapacity eliminates her capacity to refuse. Mushtaq's portrayal of this timing transforms a private act of cruelty into a structural critique: patriarchal power operates through the precise calculation of when women are most temporally exposed.

Domestic Repetition and Temporal Entrapment

Domestic labor is structured through repetition. Lefebvre [7] argues that social bodies are constituted through repeated rhythmic patterns. In Mushtaq's fiction, domestic repetition is rendered with formal insistence. The same gestures recur across stories: the preparation of food, the nursing of the sick, the organization of household time around male schedules. This repetition operates at the level of narrative form.

In "Stone Slabs for Shaista Mahal," Zeenat, the narrator, describes her domestic situation at the Krishnaraja Sagara dam quarters: "He, on the other hand, was occupied for twenty-eight out of twenty-four hours every day, either working at the office or doing research at the Karnataka Engineering Research Station" [1, p. 9]. The impossible arithmetic ("twenty-eight out of twenty-four hours") captures Mujahid's total temporal absorption. The hyperbole enacts the phenomenological reality of a husband whose professional life crowds out all domestic presence, leaving Zeenat alone in the garden, talking to plants,

narrating to an imagined audience. Her time, by contrast, is unstructured and undirected: a temporal vacancy rendered as isolation.

Zeenat's time fills, however, with the domestic rhythms of her friendship with Shaista: visiting, cooking, playing with children, managing another woman's reproductive labor from the outside. When Shaista's seventh child is born and Shaista rises from her sickbed in fifteen days, against all community conventions of confinement, Zeenat recalls her own Amma's detailed ritual of postpartum care: forty days of hot baths, specific foods, bound waists, and prohibitions, a forty-day temporal enclosure for the new mother's body. The story stages a tension between this traditional rhythmic care and Shaista's resistance to its constraints. Shaista refuses the prolonged domestic enclosure of confinement: "I have never been in confinement for more than fifteen days. I just stay warm, that's all" [1, p. 20]. Her refusal of the traditional temporal regime is both a form of liberation and, the story implies, an index of deeper domestic entrapment: she cannot afford to rest because her husband's needs, including his emotional need for her company, do not pause for her recovery.

In "Fire Rain," the domestic repetition is organized around religious and community time. Arifa, the mutawalli's wife, begins the story nursing her sick child through the night while managing the household for her husband's sister's visit. The dawn azaan marks the opening of the story's time: a religious temporal marker that initiates the mutawalli's day and interrupts Arifa's exhausted sleep. The azaan here functions not only as a narrative marker but as an instance of religious time structuring everyday life. This ritual temporality operates alongside domestic time but is unevenly experienced. While it organizes the mutawalli's public and institutional schedule, it intensifies the fragmentation of Arifa's already continuous domestic labor.

Religious time thus emerges as a parallel temporal regime that intersects with gendered power, rather than as a neutral or shared structure. Her husband's angry kick waking her from the floor of the hall, where she has collapsed in care of her sick child, is a precise instance of Sharma's [4] temporal power: his time is organized by the azaan; her sleep is available to be interrupted by his convenience. Arifa's domestic time is continuous, extending through the night in care and management, while the mutawalli's time is punctuated by the structured rhythm of prayer, public business, and political performance.

Arifa's private response, her interior whisper of the proverb "If the one who has rights is displeased, a rain of fire will fall" [1, p. 29], gestures toward a counter-temporal justice: a divine time in which the inequities of domestic chronology will be accounted for. This can be read as an instance of what Kristeva

describes as monumental time: a time beyond linear human time in which women's suffering will have weight [2].

Counter-Temporal Rupture and Subversion

Mushtaq's fiction not only represents temporal entrapment. It also registers, sometimes quietly and sometimes dramatically, the moments when women refuse or rupture the temporal regimes that govern them. These moments mark points of resistance within dominant temporal structures. They are rendered with the greatest narrative compression: a single gesture, a single line of dialogue, a matchbox falling to the ground.

In "Heart Lamp," the most extreme counter-temporal rupture takes the form of Mehrun's near self-immolation. She pours kerosene on herself in the dark front yard, having concluded that she has no temporal future within the structure of her life: "She had no desires. She sat up on the bed... The person who had done those things belonged to someone else now. There seemed no end to life" [1, p. 112]. The phrase "no end to life" frames continuity as entrapment rather than fulfillment. Time that continues without the possibility of change becomes, for Mehrun, the most complete form of imprisonment. Mehrun's gesture toward self-annihilation is thus figured not as despair of the future but as despair of repetition, of the unvarying continuation of a temporal condition that offers no rupture.

The counter-rupture comes from her daughter Salma, who wakes, smells the kerosene, rushes into the yard, and holds her mother. "Salma was still clutching her mother's legs. 'Ammi,' she was saying. 'Just because you have lost one person, you will throw all of us at that woman's mercy?'" [1, p. 114]. The matchbox falls from Mehrun's hand. The scene reorients temporal focus from the conjugal relation to the maternal bond. It does not resolve the structural conditions that produced the crisis. But it produces a counter-temporal gesture: Mehrun's time, which had contracted to a single terrible moment, is reopened by her daughter's touch.

"Be a Woman Once, Oh Lord!" ends with a different kind of temporal rupture. After her surgery, evicted from her own house, sitting on the step with her children while her husband installs his new wife, the narrator writes: "The nib of my red ink-filled heart has broken. My mouth can speak no more. No more letters to write" [1, p. 211]. This constitutes a textual form of counter-temporality. The story itself, the letter-address to God, is the rupture. The narrator's time has been taken from her in every material sense. But she has organized it into a document, a testimony, a text addressed to the divine record. The story's epistolary structure transforms private temporal suffering into legible public

testimony. This is the counter-temporal act of literature itself, which preserves and transmits the time of those whose time is systematically stolen.

"Soft Whispers" offers a more delicate counter-temporal moment. The narrator recalls a childhood memory in her grandmother Aji's village, in which Aji, a woman of spiritual authority and quiet subversion, smokes a bidi with her neighbor Qasim Bi in a doorway while the children are not watching. The moment does not resolve into narrative significance. The child narrator is bored and asks to go home. But the image lingers: two old women, outside the temporal regimes of domestic duty and pious performance, sharing tobacco in the fading evening light. This moment approximates a quite form of temporal autonomy [4]. Aji's comment, when pressed by the narrator to explain her philosophical exchange with Jaffar Baba, is simply: "Our hearts should always be pure" [1, p. 143]. Aji's statement articulates an ethical position that exceeds institutional and temporal regulation.

Conclusion

This article has argued that Banu Mushtaq's *Heart Lamp: Selected Stories* constitutes a sustained literary engagement with feminine temporality. Through theoretically informed close reading, the analysis identifies four temporal modes: waiting, bodily time, domestic repetition, and counter-temporal rupture.

Waiting emerges as gendered temporal labor, marked by the suspension of women's temporal agency in relation to institutional and domestic demands. Bodily time is represented as a site of patriarchal calculation, where female bodies are evaluated through chrononormative logics. Domestic and religious repetition structures everyday life through rhythms organized around others' needs. Counter-temporal rupture is articulated through moments of refusal, disruption, and testimony that assert limited forms of temporal agency.

These modes are not only thematic but are embedded in the narrative form of the stories. Repetition operates as both social representation and formal strategy. Epistolary structures transform private experience into textual testimony. Future research may extend this analysis to Mushtaq's Kannada originals, examining how the formal properties of the source language shape temporal representation beyond the English translation.

This study demonstrates the value of integrating feminist temporality with feminist narratology to analyze how narrative form encodes gendered experience. It also highlights the importance of engaging regional-language South Asian texts in translation as critical sites for expanding feminist literary scholarship beyond dominant Anglophone frameworks.

Author Contributions

Muhammad Rehan Sabir: Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Project administration, Writing – review & editing. **Muhammad Rehan:** Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Aryati Prasetyarini:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of Interest

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