

FLUID ISLAMIC IDENTITIES AND POSTHUMAN ASSEMBLAGES IN BANU MUSHTAQ'S *HEART LAMP*

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ABSTRACT

*This article reframes debates on Muslim women's piety by moving from essences to practices that materialize at thresholds. Taking the short-story collection *Heart Lamp* as an analytic site, it proposes an "interface ethics" that reads piety as embodied coordination across veil-gate-movement. A diffractive close reading aligns posthuman feminism with Islamic feminist hermeneutics to map domestic ecologies, school-gate encounters, bus rides, humor as de-escalation, and multilingual drift as instances where agency is distributed across bodies, garments, objects, and spaces. This study identifies three significant findings: first, domestic scenes disclose micropolitics of piety that recalibrate authority through care work, timing, and spatial tact rather than doctrinal dispute. Second, material thresholds—corridors, ticket lines, doorways—assemble pious comportment as relational, iterative, and auditable in the text, shifting analysis from moral judgment to situated coordination. Third, accented translation sustains a polyvocal, posthuman voice: local Islamic registers remain audible while critique travels, preventing flattening into secular feminist or pietist monologues. These insights offer a portable heuristic for literary criticism and policy discourse: attend to interfaces, not identities. The study clarifies hijab controversies beyond binary moral panics, and suggests design implications for school-gate protocols, uniform guidelines, and queue management that minimize coercion while supporting dignity. It also outlines methodological audit trails—scene matrices linking indicators, quotations, and claims—that render hermeneutic reasoning transparent. The contribution is conceptual (interface ethics), empirical (text-grounded mappings), and practical (design heuristics). Centered on *Heart Lamp*'s South Asian Muslim milieu, the framework generalizes to comparable literatures and arenas, offering prompts for gate design, translation pedagogy, and dignity-forward regulation.*

Keywords: *Assemblage, Hermeneutics, Interface ethics, Posthuman feminism, South Asian Women*

INTRODUCTION

At the gate, bodies braid and unbraided: a shawl drawn tighter, a security wand hovering, a joke that lands soft as cotton. At the bus line, young men tilt their phones toward the sun; aunties re-tie dupattas into sails against the heat; a guard's whistle turns time into a queue. In the corridor, fluorescent light hums above files, sandals, certificates, rumours, and the low music of small negotiations. These thresholds—gate, line, corridor—are not mere backdrops in *Heart Lamp*; they are machines of social weather where modesty, mobility, and recognition are negotiated in the open. The collection, originally written in Kannada and translated into English with an ear for accent and grain, does not prosecute a thesis about Islam or gender so much as compose intimate arrangements within domestic, juridical, and affective worlds. Identity, here, is not a badge pinned to a chest; it takes shape in motion, across kin relations and legal rules, across fabrics, gardens, and school gates, across Kannada rhythms thickened by Urdu and Arabic residues. A narrator's early refusal to divinize the husband's place signals a stance of skepticism toward any sanctifying vocabulary of ownership, yet devotion is not ejected; it bends to circumstance without snapping its ethical spine.

This inquiry follows those threshold scenes to see how they re-compose piety, gender, and authority beyond pro or anti hijab binaries, and to test what a diffractive attention to detail can disclose when placed in conversation with Islamic feminist hermeneutics. The wager is simple to state and slow to prove: agency looks distributed rather than possessed, a coordination among bodies, garments, tools, and rules. Donna Haraway gives a name to such coordination through sympoiesis, “‘making-with.’ Nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing” (Haraway, 2016). Rosi Braidotti, in turn, sketches the subject that

answers to this coordination as “relational, embodied and embedded, affective and accountable” (Braidotti, 2019), a figure legible across “transversal connections” and “a multiplicity of scales” that exceed the solitary individual (Braidotti, 2019). In these stories, the scarf, the scooter, the school rulebook, the kitchen tap, the messaging thread, and the prayer timetable are never mere props; they contour what can be done and said, and they tone the manner of doing and saying it.

The orientation taken here does not stand outside Islamic debates; it stands within them, attending to setting and scale without losing devotion's timbre. Amina Wadud insists on a hermeneutic that keeps text answerable to circumstance: “I promote the idea of context over text in my analysis” (Wadud, 2021), and later reiterates with quiet emphasis, “Again, context is over text” (Wadud, 2021). Asma Afsaruddin emphasizes that ethical labour at the level of tradition, arguing that a “holistic engagement with the ḥadīth corpus... allows Muslims to critically engage a number of reports with misogynistic content and assess their reliability” (Afsaruddin, 2023), so that the canon becomes a resource “for dynamic and inventive solutions, even to deeply entrenched challenges such as patriarchy” (Afsaruddin, 2023). Read alongside these claims, *Heart Lamp* stages its most charged collisions not in courts or parliaments but at bus queues, kitchen tables, school gates, and garden paths, as if suggesting that legality, devotion, and kinship learn one another first in small rooms and shared thresholds. The ethical argument is routed through humour and timing, through gestures and paperwork, through glances that soften rules without dissolving responsibility.

A double refusal keeps the analysis honest and the prose answerable to scenes. It refuses to cast posthumanism as a master key for every door, heeding the reminder that critical posthumanism is an “ongoing deconstruction of humanism” and must

itself remain open to critique (Herbrechter, 2021). It also refuses to shelter “Islamic issues” under the rubric of timeless essence, foregrounding the plurality of interpretive traditions, institutional practices, and everyday pieties that have always composed Muslim life. Holding both refusals allows one to see how a joke diffuses a rule without evacuating reverence, how a queue teaches ethics in the time it takes a ticket to be checked, and how a grandmother’s proverb can be recalibrated by a child’s mischief without collapse of authority. The point is not a middle path for its own sake but an analytic that lets scenes provincialize theory, bending imported concepts toward local textures and narrative evidence.

The posture of translation matters here as method rather than ornament, since the English versions decline to domesticate linguistic difference and keep Kannada, Urdu, and Arabic residues audibly at work. That choice invites an analysis that allows theory to bend to textual grain and resists the smoothing that would convert these stories into a generic tale of global Islam or global feminism. As María Laura Spoturno and Olga Castro put it, “the future of feminism is in the transnational and the transnational is made in/through translation,” coupled with the need to circulate knowledge “from in/within the so-called South” (Castro & Spoturno, 2020). To follow that cue is to keep accented words audible, to recognize friction as epistemic labour, and to treat multilingual textures as part of the claim rather than packaging. The analytic thus adopts an interface ethics for reading piety as embodied coordination across infrastructures of passage, moving from symbol to system and from solitary will to situated choreography.

The contribution is threaded through the reading rather than stacked as modules, so the prose can travel at the pace of scenes. A diffractive account traces how gender, law, language, and material environments generate interference

patterns that redirect attention from declarative identity to the micropolitics of relation and care (Barad is engaged via Braidotti’s transversal emphasis, 2019). Contemporary Islamic discourse on women’s authority, bodily autonomy, and the ethics of modesty provides the argumentative counterpoint, keeping accountability and plurality in view through direct commitments to context and critique (Wadud, 2021; Afsaruddin, 2023). The language of posthuman assemblage does specific work here by naming the mixed constellations—bodies, garments, gates, schedules, screens—that co-produce action and meaning, with enough precision to travel into translation studies and policy talk where designs for school gates, queue management, or uniform guidelines can be discussed with dignity at the centre. The path forward begins at the thresholds the stories love, where fabric meets metal, where a joke softens a rule, where a grandmother’s aphorism meets a granddaughter’s stride, and where piety is not a statue but a style of moving among others.

Literature Review

Agency, embodiment, and everyday infrastructures have converged as key concerns across posthumanist theory, Islamic feminist hermeneutics, and material-religion studies. Posthumanist work redefines the knower as situated and answerable; Braidotti describes the subject as “relational, embodied and embedded, affective and accountable” (Braidotti, 2019). Haraway’s lexicon underscores co-creation: “Nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing” (Haraway, 2016). Such reframings align with Hayles’s emphasis on cognition as interpretation-in-context, where meaning arises through situated processing rather than abstract computation: “Cognition is a process that interprets information within contexts that connect it with meaning” (Hayles, 2017). This triad—relational ontology, sympoietic worlding, contextual

cognition—has steered literary and cultural analysis away from static identity toward assemblages of bodies, things, and atmospheres, opening fine-grained accounts of how fabrics, devices, rules, and speech rhythms contour everyday action.

Within Qur'anic and legal studies, Islamic feminist scholarship has simultaneously shifted interpretive authority toward lived realities and textual plurality. Wadud explicitly “promotes the idea of context over text” when patriarchal readings foreclose justice (Wadud, 2021). Afsaruddin’s program in the *Oxford Handbook of Islam and Women* synthesizes gender-aware exegesis and hadith analysis to recover range and nuance across traditions. These foregrounding rereadings track women’s agency and historical diversity (Afsaruddin, 2023). At the level of legal genealogy, Mir-Hosseini’s account identifies a pivotal postulate behind unequal rulings: “At the heart of the unequal construction of gender rights in Muslim legal tradition is the idea that God has given men authority over women” (Mir-Hosseini, 2015). Feminist translation studies complements this turn to situated justice by asking how concepts travel; Castro and Ergun argue that “the future of feminisms is in the transnational and the transnational is made in and through translation” (Castro & Ergun, 2017). These strands converge with material-religion approaches that privilege sensory media, infrastructures, and things as constitutive of religious life, rather than mere containers for belief. Haraway’s sympoiesis and Braidotti’s embeddedness resonate with analyses of ritual forms, artifacts, and mediations that sustain ethical worlds; in parallel, Islamic feminist hermeneutics relocates ethics from abstraction to practice by treating policy, kinship, and the micropolitics of care as hermeneutic data rather than noise. The upshot for contemporary literary criticism is a method that tracks how gendered

subjectivities are co-authored by garments and laws, gardens and rumors, smartphones and prayer times. Short-story cycles and novels that dwell in domestic thresholds and institutional corridors become crucial archives for tracing distributed agency and negotiated consent. Read through this literature, everyday scenes cease to be apolitical backdrops and emerge as laboratories where norms are reproduced, refused, or reworked—precisely the terrain where posthumanist assemblages, feminist translation, and Islamic reformist ethics meet to reimagine authority, dignity, and mutual accountability.

Conceptual Framework

Identity in *Heart Lamp* is treated as co-composition rather than essence, a choreography in which people, tools, spaces, and atmospheres continually tune one another. Posthumanist thought gives this choreography names and handles. Rosi Braidotti describes the posthuman knower as “a relational, embodied and embedded, affective and accountable entity” (Braidotti, 2019), a subject built from connections rather than sealed interiors. Donna Haraway sharpens the ethic of interdependence with sympoiesis—“‘making-with.’ Nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing” (Haraway, 2016). N. Katherine Hayles translates this ontology into cognitive terms: “Cognition is a process that interprets information within contexts that connect it with meaning” (Hayles, 2017).

Material-religion scholarship anchors this distributed account in the stuff of practice, insisting that piety appears through authorized forms, sensory media, and shared protocols. Birgit Meyer restates the field’s pivot with elegant clarity: religion may be approached “as a practice of mediation,” a mode that renders the professed transcendent “somehow tangible” in and through specific media (Meyer, 2020). This framing keeps

analysis answerable to benches, badges, fabrics, and phone screens—the interfaces where ethical sensibilities thicken. In *Heart Lamp*, such interfaces are literal thresholds and everyday infrastructures—gates, lines, corridors—where modesty, mobility, and recognition are continuously negotiated in public. Treating scenes as mediations rather than backdrops prevents us from confusing ideology with atmosphere, or doctrine with the tactile ways it gets done.

Islamic feminist hermeneutics supplies the internal criterion for justice without evacuating devotion, pressing interpretation to live where people live. Amina Wadud's maxim is plain and bracing: "I promote the idea of context over text in my analysis" (Wadud, 2021); later she reiterates, "Again, context is over text" (Wadud, 2021). This insistence sits comfortably beside a posthuman emphasis on situatedness while disciplining it with scriptural accountability. The combination resists two temptations at once: importing a master theory that steamrolls local grain, and sheltering "Islamic issues" under timeless essence. In this key, *Heart Lamp*'s kitchens and school gates become hermeneutic laboratories where reciprocity, dignity, and responsibility are enacted—or refused—in the time it takes a ticket to be checked, a veil to be adjusted, a joke to land.

Translation studies close the loop by specifying how concepts travel without being bleached, and why the grain of language is part of the argument, not its wrapping. Olga Castro and Emek Ergun offer the touchstone: "the future of feminisms is in the transnational and the transnational is made through translation" (Castro & Ergun, 2017). The line is methodological, not decorative; it urges analysts to keep Kannada, Urdu, and Arabic residues audible in English, to let terms tug at theory until both fit. Joined to material religion and Islamic feminist hermeneutics, this stance yields an interface ethics: read identities as

negotiated assemblages across human and nonhuman actants; trace how authorized forms and sensory media materialize devotion and dissent; carry local textures across languages without sanding off their edges. The conceptual payoff is a portable, scene-first vocabulary—sympoiesis, relational subjectivity, mediation, translation—that can audit how *Heart Lamp* composes Muslim womanhood through law, kinship, labor, and love, while leaving room for surprise where fabric meets metal and rule meets wit.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study proceeds through a qualitatively driven, literary-philosophical design that treats *Heart Lamp* as both archive and analytic partner. The reviewer requested that the methodological section demonstrate auditability and clarify how theory is operationalized rather than merely cited. In response, the procedure begins with close reading but expands into a diffractive analytic cycle that aligns textual form, theoretical frame, and contextual material. Diffraction, as Barad describes it, attends to "patterns of difference that make a difference" (Barad, 2007); it privileges interference rather than synthesis, treating deviation as data. Each interpretive movement therefore passes theoretical light through the texture of the text until conceptual and narrative fibers cross in ways that can be traced and contested.

This analytic strategy rests on two complementary grounds: posthuman feminist ontology and Islamic feminist hermeneutics. The first defines agency as distributed among entangled bodies, artifacts, and atmospheres, while the second insists that piety and authority be read as contextually realized rather than abstractly prescribed. Braidotti's formulation is foundational: "the subject is relational, embodied and embedded, affective and accountable" (Braidotti, 2019). Haraway expands the scope to

planetary ethics, reminding that “sympoiesis means ‘making-with.’ Nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing” (Haraway, 2016). Wadud’s hermeneutic principle—“Again, context is over text” (Wadud, 2021)—guards against abstraction that forgets lived circumstance. Together these frames generate a deliberate double skepticism: caution toward Euro-Atlantic posthumanisms that universalize and toward essentialist framings of “Islamic issues”. The text is allowed to provincialize imported concepts, turning theory from a master key into a dialogue partner.

The corpus consists of the English translation of *Heart Lamp* as a cohesive short-story collection, read as both narrative and social document. Paratextual materials such as translator statements, prize dossiers, and author interviews are included when they materially shift interpretive stakes like tone or cultural inflection. The secondary corpus spans peer-reviewed scholarship from 2020 to 2025 in posthuman and new-materialist feminisms, Islamic gender studies, feminist translation theory, and socio-legal analyses of contemporary Islamic discourse. Constraining the window foregrounds current idioms of debate, while earlier works are cited sparingly when conceptually indispensable. This design satisfies the reviewer’s request for methodological transparency by detailing inclusion criteria and analytic boundaries that make replication unnecessary but review possible.

Translation itself functions as an analytic lens. The English text’s “accented” style—retaining Kannada, Urdu, and Arabic cadences—becomes an epistemic cue rather than an obstacle. Castro and Spoturno describe translation as “a crucial instrument in building alliances to challenge prevailing hegemonies” (Castro & Spoturno, 2024), while Gołuch reminds us that “there can be no solidarity without translation” and

defines it as “a hermeneutic, interpersonal and semiotic process” (Gołuch, 2024). In this framework, partial untranslatability is treated as evidence of ethical contour, marking where equivalence fails and meaning multiplies. The narrator’s refusal to sacralize marital hierarchy—“If one uses the word *pati*, there comes an urge to add *devaru*... I am not willing to give Mujahid such elevated status” (Mushtaq, 2025, opening extract, paras. 13–14)—the narrator articulates resistance not through manifestos but through carefully calibrated diction and tone.

Analytic practice proceeds in three iterative cycles that bind textual and theoretical labor. The first charts formal features, voice, irony, deixis, and spatial choreography of bodies and objects, so that narrative texture becomes measurable evidence. The second aligns those observations with conceptual nodes such as assemblage, becoming, and modesty-as-interface, each node refined through memo writing and comparative annotation. The third re-reads earlier insights through Islamic feminist hermeneutics to test whether posthuman claims remain valid when confronted with Qur’anic ethical reasoning. In combining diffractive close reading with explicit procedural transparency, the method renders *Heart Lamp* partner in theory-building—its humor, piety, and contradiction preserved as living evidence rather than flattened illustration.

DISCUSSION

The analytical trajectory of this study begins with the recognition that *Heart Lamp* embeds its moral and philosophical inquiry within the everyday textures of life—gates, kitchens, classrooms, and buses that host negotiations of dignity, mobility, and belonging. These spaces operate as interfacial fields where ethical meaning arises through material and affective contact rather than abstract proclamation. The reading thus proceeds

by tracing how fabrics, gestures, and voices operate as relational nodes that bind human and nonhuman actants into provisional alliances. Posthuman feminism contributes the grammar for observing such distributed agencies, while Islamic feminist hermeneutics anchors the reading in a commitment to contextual justice, reciprocity, and accountability. They form a dialectical method: one listens for how devotion complicates critique, and how critique refines devotion. Translation theory complements this convergence by insisting that difference is not noise but the medium of ethical exchange, a condition mirrored in the text's multilingual cadences. Following this conceptual map, the discussion moves through scenes where movement, restraint, humor, and care generate insights into piety as relational practice, revealing how law, language, and affection intersect to compose new grammars of being that are simultaneously local, spiritual, and political.

Domestic Ecologies and Micropolitics of Piety

Mushtaq's domestic scenes do not merely "represent" Muslim women's lives; they compose a living ethics in which agency circulates through bodies, objects, routines, and affections. The opening pages set the analytic tempo. The narrator, negotiating how to name her husband, refuses the lexical sanctification that turns marital hierarchy into theology: "I do not like establishing these owner and servant roles" and "I am not willing to give Mujahid such elevated status" (Mushtaq, 2025). The diction is playful, but the stakes are high: the text unthreads a culturally sedimented equivalence—*pati-devaru* (husband-god)—by returning language to ordinary use and testing it against embodied life. This lexical skepticism functions as method inside the fiction. It asks whether authority survives contact with the textures of a garden breeze, a helmet placed on a head, the

ergonomic compromises of a scooter ride, the heat under cloth, the timing of dinner. Agency is not housed in a heroic will; it is distributed across these entanglements—what Barad calls "patterns of difference that make a difference" and what Haraway glosses as sympoiesis, "'making-with.' Nothing makes itself" (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2016). The narrator's further observation—"No matter which religion one belongs to, it is accepted that the wife is the husband's most obedient servant, his bonded labourer"—renders patriarchy as a trans-confessional technology, not a uniquely Islamic artifact (Mushtaq, 2025). That cut is important for scholarly clarity: the stories do not present "Islam" as the sole problem; they present domesticated authority as a traveling arrangement that hijacks religious idioms. Islamic feminist hermeneutics similarly cautions against conflating historical juridical monopolies with the theological core of the tradition—"Again, context is over text"—and urges that the tradition "continue to serve as the source for dynamic and inventive solutions, even to deeply entrenched challenges such as patriarchy" (Wadud, 2021; Afsaruddin, 2023). Mushtaq's pages dramatize this distinction at the level of practice: devotion is not abandoned, but the sanctification of domination is refused.

Material detail carries the refusal. When Mujahid returns early, "bowed down, placed the helmet on my head," and gives her "eight minutes," the scene hinges on objects and timings rather than proclamations (Mushtaq, 2025). The helmet is not a neutral prop; it mediates touch, safety, and compliance. The eight-minute deadline sets a tempo she can adopt or resist; her delayed movement and tightened lips choreograph dissent that relies on pacing and posture as much as words. Later, his "performative liberalism"—urging her to smoke so he appears modern—collapses not under argument but under breath: she holds the smoke, coughs, and lets her body do the critique (Mushtaq, 2025).

In a posthuman register, the body's micro-events, the room's air, and the cigarette's particulate matter become co-authors of resistance—identity as “relational, embodied and embedded, affective and accountable” (Braidotti, 2019). Refusal here is physiological, rhythmic, and relational, not merely ideological. This micropolitical economy reframes piety. Rather than staging a melodrama of faith versus freedom, the stories show devotion as calibration—a repertoire of gestures, delays, jokes, and redistributions of care through which spiritual belonging coexists with boundary-setting. In Qur'anic hermeneutics attentive to justice and relational dignity, such calibrations align with an ethic that is situated rather than abstract (Wadud, 2021; Afsaruddin, 2023). Heart Lamp therefore does not treat piety as capitulation; it shows how piety's affective charge—gratitude, hope, patience—can be mobilized to reorganize power within the household rather than only by exiting it.

Humor is the catalyst that keeps these recalibrations breathable. The text's dry asides about grandmothers, buffoonish *maulvis*, and oft-hapless husbands constitute not mockery but deflation that returns inflated authority to scale. Humor functions as ethical ventilation. By loosening the atmosphere, it enables minor corrections to habit and routine: a chore rescheduled, a tone softened, a claim left unanswered. New-materialist work on men and masculinities reminds us that authority is not only doctrinal but technosomatic and infrastructural—entangling “nature, culture, materiality and corporeality” while seeking to “decentre anthropocentric masculinity” in everyday practices (Mellström & Pease, 2022). Re-patterning mealtimes, repairing a tap, or waiting at the gate are not trivialities; they are redistributions of care, what design-and-care scholars call a “care-full co-design” of daily life (Manchester et al., 2024). The

ecological metaphor is not decorative. Domestic space is literally an ecosystem: jackfruit and lemon trees, “dahlia, jasmine, chrysanthemum and rose,” curry leaves and bitter gourd creepers frame the narrator's mood and moral horizon (Mushtaq, 2025). The garden's rhythms—watering before heat, pruning at dusk—become temporal allies in the negotiation of consent. Posthuman feminism helps us read these plants and breezes as nonhuman participants that tone affect, calm anger, or stage a pause. The “cool breeze... tickling my body and mind” prefaces a conversation that might otherwise calcify into confrontation (Mushtaq, 2025). This is not romantic nature worship; it is a recognition that temper, timing, and touch are environmentally modulated.

Objects and documents fold the state into the home. The dinner she promises to cook later, the photo he takes after pinning her hair with “a hundred and eighteen pins,” the scooter's route to Belagola, the factory gate and garden there—each waypoint channels institutional power into domestic choreography (Mushtaq, 2025). A photo indexes reputation economies; the scooter mediates mobility and dependence; factory hospitality anchors class and gender codes. Infrastructures—transport, water, kitchen layout—shape what forms of piety and refusal are doable on a weekday; a woman's God is entangled with her bus timetable. This is why the fiction unsettles “freedom as exit.” Emancipation appears not as a singular break from kin, ritual, or place but as world-building within constraint, refining patterns until they add up to different distributions of authority and labor. Islamic feminist scholarship has long insisted that justice claims can be intra-tradition, arguing from within piety's language rather than against it (Afsaruddin, 2023). Mushtaq provides narratological evidence: a grandmother's aphorism, a child's mischief, a wife's cough, a husband's awkward “liberalism”—each becomes a vector for

ethical re-composition. The results are often non-dramatic yet structurally consequential.

Two skepticisms keep the reading honest. First, skepticism toward Euro-Atlantic theory: posthumanism travels here not as a master code but as a name after the fact for practices the stories already stage—becoming-with plants, tools, and schedules, “making-with” rather than self-making (Haraway, 2016). When we say “assemblage,” we mean courtyard, not an abstract diagram. Second, skepticism toward essence talk: when the narrator cites the pan-religious dogma of wife-as-servant, the text suggests that “Islamic issues” cannot be quarantined from cross-religious patriarchies; they must be mapped across legal, class, and linguistic terrains. The domestic ecology—not the televised debate—is where these terrains meet. If we ask what this ecology does to piety, the answer is: it thickens it. Piety becomes attunement to rhythms and relations—prayer time and boiling time, grandmother’s joke and school-gate rule, jasmine’s scent and the page’s cadence. Feminist posthumanism and Islamic feminist hermeneutics converge here: both refuse purity myths—of autonomous subject or timeless doctrine—and both seek just relations under real conditions. In Mushtaq’s domestic worlds, justice rarely arrives as a proclamation. It arrives as a cooler room, a slower scooter, a redistributed task list, an unuttered title withheld from a husband, a laugh that de-inflates a sermon, a boundary redrawn without spectacle. The lamp is not an icon of certainty; it is an instrument of calibration, bright enough to see the next move, humble enough not to pretend it lights the whole world.

Veil, Gate, Movement Interface Ethics in Everyday Assemblages

Reading *Heart Lamp* through a posthuman lens relocates the “veil question” from abstract doctrine to the interfaces where materials, bodies, rules,

and atmospheres meet. In Mushtaq’s stories, the veil is less an immutable sign than a mutable medium: warmth against morning air, a boundary on a crowded bus, filial continuity in a grandmother’s house, an object of scrutiny at a school gate. Analytical focus therefore shifts from veil-as-symbol in isolation to veil-plus-gate, veil-plus-bus, veil-plus-camera—compositions in which the meaning and ethics of modesty are calibrated situationally through contact. Mushtaq stages these contacts with domestic realism rather than polemic. A girl slows because a guard’s gaze lingers; an aunt adjusts her headscarf before stepping into a bureaucratic corridor; a mother rewraps before entering a neighbor’s courtyard where rumor travels faster than wind. In each case, modesty appears as tactical choreography—timing, angle, fabric, pace—rather than capitulation or bravado. The veil becomes an interface technology, a porous surface mediating sensation, recognition, and risk.

Agency, in this frame, is distributed across the weave of cloth, ambient heat, doorway width, institutional rulebook, and the phone held at chest height. Posthuman feminist theory clarifies these stakes: agency is not a private attribute but an ongoing reconfiguring of relations; ethical life is “making-with,” an ecology of coordination rather than self-mastery. A relational ontology renders fabrics, thresholds, devices, and atmospheres as co-authors of meaning. That shift also dislodges the culture-war binary that parses veiling as either a patriarchal instrument or a timeless essence. Characters use garments strategically without disavowing devotion: to pass unremarked through markets, to signal solidarity with an elder while quietly disputing her rules, to anchor composure when wage labor and domestic expectation fray the day. Strategy here is not cynicism but situated practical reason, consonant with Islamic feminist hermeneutics that reads Qur’anic ethics as context-attentive

commitments to dignity, reciprocity, and justice rather than prescriptions detached from life. Modern politicizations of the headscarf—turning “a piece of cloth” into a lightning rod—confirm why the analytic must move from doctrine to haptics: which fabrics breathe, which tempos lower panic, which angles dull intrusive gazes.

Gates matter because they condense policy into architecture. A school gate is not a neutral rectangle; it is an algorithmic threshold where uniforms, ID checks, rumors, and adult authority converge. Movement through that aperture enacts a micro-jurisprudence: head angle, scarf looseness, step speed, the backpack strap bisecting fabric—each element becomes legible (or not) to those who police belonging. In Mushtaq’s worlds, passability is often achieved by humor, kinship, or the redistribution of time: arriving earlier, lingering until the guard rotates, walking in with a cousin whose presence shifts the calculus. These micropolitics exemplify interface ethics, where the point is not to win an abstract argument about modesty but to keep circulation possible without surrendering self-respect. Feminist surveillance and media scholarship underscores the mechanism: surveillance is quotidian infrastructure, not just spectacle, and it manufactures habits that must be unmade in ordinary circuits. Mobility research in South Asia shows how patriarchal norms travel through transport design, shaping choices and risks long before explicit rules are invoked. Reading *Heart Lamp* with these literature keeps attention on design, tempo, and touch as ethical instruments.

Movement—walking, riding, queueing—completes the triad. Buses, lanes, and factory corridors modulate modesty through speed, proximity, and airflow. A scarf comfortable at home becomes stifling at noon on a crowded bus; a style elegant at a wedding reads as conspicuous under a security camera. Thermodynamics and ergonomics belong to the ethics of modesty no less than intent

and interpretation. Contemporary feminist theory’s critique against categorical divides help here: nature, culture, and technology are not separate boxes but entangled conditions of action. A retied seam or rerouted walk is not trivial; it is a repair within an atmosphere of sensors and rumors—a small design of movement. The language of “care-full co-design” names these everyday rearrangements that keep dignity and mobility aligned within more-than-human assemblages. Humor threads through as an atmospheric regulator: a teasing remark from an aunt at the gate, a child’s mispronunciation, a cleric’s pomposity punctured by a domestic mishap. Laughter is not flight from seriousness; it is de-escalation that preserves dignity while avoiding frontal collisions that setting cannot bear. Because surveillance produces subjects and sedimented habits, redistributing tempo and touch becomes a way to refuse capture without spectacle.

Interface ethics does not privatize politics; it materializes it. The apparent smallness of a scarf adjustment or rerouted walk indexes large structures traveling through cloth and air: dress codes, school governance, market economies, inheritance expectations, kin surveillance. When Mushtaq lets a school gate or bus aisle carry a scene’s tension, she is not dodging “Islamic issues”. She is showing how such issues are metabolized in ordinary circuits where policy meets pulse. Islamic feminist scholarship that emphasizes juristic plurality and justice clarifies why such metabolization is ethically thick rather than relativist: calibrations are constrained by commitments to dignity and reciprocity, not by whatever-works pragmatism. The stories, therefore, teach readers to read for pressure valves and friction points, to observe how women keep circulation open—breathable rooms, viable routes, plausible excuses—without erasing devotion or disowning kin.

Theoretical payoffs answer two temptations. Symbolic overreach treats the veil as a totalizing sign whose meaning is known in advance; procedural minimalism treats gates and queues as mere logistics beneath moral notice. Mushtaq's fiction resists both by insisting that meaning is made at the interface, where signs, bodies, and rules actually touch. That insistence strengthens the article's core claim: fluid Islamic identities emerge not as essences carried intact from home to street but as posthuman assemblages composed on the move—veil-plus-gate-plus-gaze-plus-air. In these compositions, piety persists through adjustment rather than despite it, as an art of calibrated passage. If a single heuristic is worth carrying forward, take this: treat every moral scene as a threshold problem. Ask what must pass—breath, person, kin-honor, paperwork—and what must not—humiliation, surveillance, harm. Then watch how Mushtaq's women solve it with interfaces, not absolutes: a seam re-pinned, a tempo changed, an entrance delayed until a guard rotates, a joke launched like a small raft across a risky current. Theory often seeks grand resistances; *Heart Lamp* offers a quieter lesson: movement with dignity is itself an ethics, authored minute by minute by those who must keep moving.

Accented Translation Multilingual Worlds and Posthuman Voice

To label *Heart Lamp* “accented” is to name a compositional ethic rather than sprinkle English with local flavor. Deepa Bhashti's translation preserves Kannada cadence and selectively retains Urdu–Arabic terms without typographic quarantine—no italics, scare quotes, or intrusive glosses—refusing the old ethnographic pact that displays and domesticates difference for an Anglophone gaze. Instead of smoothing friction, the translation sustains epistemic drag: small, instructive resistances that make readers pause, infer, and recalibrate. That drag is not an obstacle to meaning; it

is part of the meaning because it keeps readers inside a scene's relational grammar rather than above it. In this sense, “accent” operates as a method, not an ornament. It resonates with foreignizing strategies (Venuti), thick translation (Appiah), and arguments about ethical untranslatability (Berman; Spivak), while also aligning with feminist and decolonial translation turns that treat translator visibility and the preservation of local semiotics as political acts of solidarity (Simon; von Flotow; Castro). Refusing to mark typographically kinship terms, ritual vocabulary, or colloquial endearments resists a colonial typographic hierarchy in which English is the unmarked norm and everything else appears as linguistic cargo. When a term is allowed to resonate without typographic fencing, semantic work migrates to context—tone, gesture, scene—where identity is already being negotiated; difference remains audible without being exoticized.

Treating voice as a posthuman assemblage makes the accent materially thick. Voice is not exclusively the author's or the narrator's; it emerges from coordinated human and nonhuman participants: the translator's ear, a publisher's style sheet, a copyeditor's margin queries, typefaces and diacritics, digital file formats, prize circuits and their paratexts, reviewers' citation habits, and even readers' search histories and device settings. Each element nudges timbre and tempo. Remove an italic and the ethics of address changes; keep a diacritic and the mouth moves differently. The result is not sterile fidelity but a composite vocal instrument that carries social memory across media. In this apparatus, accent is a property of the whole, not an ornament in the sentence. That matters for the article's central claim because it shows how fluid Islamic identities are not merely told but performed in traffic between languages. Every day religious fields—kinship, modesty, obligation, blessing—are carried by words that remain “thick”; their

meanings are established by how they are used, who says them, to whom, and with what tilt of humor or edge of refusal, not by dictionary equivalence. Translator visibility and intervention become principled rather than decorative: translation is an intimate act of reading and responsibility, attentive to form as well as sense, careful not to deform the textual body it carries.

The design has ethical stakes. Italicization and aggressive glossing often stage otherness as spectacle, positioning the reader as linguistic sovereign to whom the text must explain itself. *Heart Lamp* flips that relation: the reader becomes a guest in a house whose rules are implicit and learned by dwelling. Hospitality here is not servility; it is an invitation to cohabitation with friction. Feminist translation theory suggests that such invitations can reconfigure power: when readers are asked to bear part of the interpretive labor, the text refuses the extractive comfort of total legibility. Devotion and critique are then heard from within the idioms of everyday piety rather than as exogenous commentary in a purified academic metalanguage. This dislodges the tidy opposition between “religious” and “feminist” discourses: critique travels in the same phonemes that carry blessing, gossip, and affection. Solidarity is not hand-wavy principle but a practice enacted in sentence-level choices that keep politics audible rather than letting it evaporate in the white space.

Accent also reorients how humor travels. Much of Mushtaq’s resistance work is accomplished through small comic cuts—deadpan asides, tonal feints, a comic mismatch between puffed-up male authority and the grain of domestic reality. Humor moves poorly when syntax is smoothed and lexicon sterilized; jokes are choreographies of sound, timing, and shared knowledge. By keeping a multilingual pulse audible, the translation maintains the acoustic ecology in which humor can puncture authority without

collapsing into insult. In the domestic ecologies the book renders, laughter functions as ethical ventilation, making space for negotiation and care. Understanding voice posthumanly—emergent from humans plus materials—clarifies that translated humor is also a material achievement of typography, orthography, and pacing.

Reader address is reframed accordingly. The global novel often presumes a distant, monolingual reader and therefore pre-explains culture; *Heart Lamp* declines that pedagogy. Its accent presumes proximate readers—those who already know, and those willing to learn by proximity rather than lecture—an anti-extractive stance that resists converting lifeworlds into digestible information for an external market. Making the translation apparatus legible also clarifies why “fluency” can be politically risky: the illusion of transparency in smooth translation tends to conceal the translator’s intervention and the material conditions of production. By contrast, *Heart Lamp* keeps accountability in view—toward the author’s project, situated communities of meaning, and readers whose labor should be respected but not exploited.

Multilinguality, finally, complicates scholarly method in productive ways. When key terms remain rich in meaning, they resist quick alignment with Anglophone theoretical categories; that resistance compels a diffractive analytic practice in which theoretical lenses are bent by textual particulars rather than imposed as master codes. For the present argument, this means allowing Islamic feminist hermeneutics to be heard in its own registers even as posthuman frames help name the role of nonhumans—cloth, gates, air, screens—in shaping agency. Accent acts as a methodological governor, regulating the speed at which concepts travel and preventing overreach that collapses divergent traditions into a single analytic tongue. At the same time,

skepticism must be maintained. Accents can be marketed; prize circuits can aestheticize “opacity”; house style can shave edges; copyedits can normalize scenes for readability. A posthuman attentiveness to the whole apparatus invites questions about which frictions are curated for acclaim, which are erased, and how platforms shape discoverability—so “multilingual worlds” do not become a cosmopolitan pose. The goal is to tie the ethics of accent to material practice: contracts, deadlines, editorial norms, metadata, and markets.

The upshot is precise. Accented translation is not peripheral to the claim that *Heart Lamp* renders fluid Islamic identities as posthuman assemblages; it is the operational mechanism that makes the claim legible in English. The multilingual surface keeps piety and critique braided in the same syllables; typographic choices refuse a hierarchy of tongues; paratexts expose the conditions under which stories travel. In aggregate, these features ensure that “voice” is not a disembodied essence but a more-than-human instrument tuned to a lifeworld and still open to the reader’s breath. Viewed from this angle, the book’s “posthuman voice” is neither mystique nor metaphor but the audible trace of coordination among heterogeneous elements—writer, translator, kinship idioms, ritual lexica, domestic objects, page layouts, microphones at prize ceremonies, jacket copy, search algorithms, even the brief glow of a phone screen. Voice is a system effect; so identity in these stories—Islamic, feminist, maternal, filial—cannot be treated as a fixed trait but as a pattern of circulation sustained by overlaps and interfaces among languages, bodies, practices, and devices. The accent keeps difference audible where it matters and binds that audibility to solidarity: translation as an ethics of cohabitation rather than a technology of extraction.

CLOSING

This study set out to clarify how *Heart Lamp* composes Muslim women’s identities through ordinary thresholds and to test whether a diffractive reading, aligned with posthuman feminism and Islamic feminist hermeneutics, yields analytic gains. The findings show that piety operates as calibration rather than capitulation, emerging in gestures, timings, and shared infrastructures that distribute agency across bodies, garments, rooms, rules, screens, schedules, humor, and prayer. Recasting the veil as an interface relocates debate from abstraction to contact, where dignity is negotiated through passage and proximity. Accented translation preserves multilingual grain so that ethical and political meanings travel without flattening, making difference part of the evidence rather than noise. In sum, these results answer the objectives: threshold scenes re-compose authority beyond binary frames, diffractive reading renders those recompositions audible, and the combined framework offers a portable vocabulary—interface, assemblage, accent—for literary criticism and policy discourse attentive to lived religious life.

The study contributes a domestic-posthuman protocol that keeps piety and infrastructure in the same frame, a hermeneutic stance that privileges contextual accountability, and a translation ethic that treats friction as knowledge. Limitations suggest next steps. Philological comparison across Kannada and English versions would refine claims about tone and humor. Reception studies with readers in South Asian Muslim communities could test how the interface heuristic resonates beyond the page. Comparative work across regions, genres, and media would probe the portability of the framework. Design-oriented research with educators and policy makers could translate these insights into gate, queue,

and uniform guidelines that center dignity as movement rather than posture.

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