



THE SCHOOLS' LAUREATE 2026 BOOK GUIDE

HEART LAMP

By Banu Mushtaq

Translated from Kannada by Deepa Bhasthi

Heart Lamp is an anthology of twelve short stories by Banu Mushtaq. She wrote them in Kannada, a language spoken in the state of Karnataka in southwestern India. The stories are about people living in the towns and villages of Karnataka. Each story takes us into a different home and a different set of family relationships. Some people are educated, some are rich; others have little or no power, status or money. People are sometimes vain, sometimes jealous, sometimes kind. Again and again we see people deceiving themselves as to their true motivations and finding ways to evade responsibility. Some of the stories are funny; often they are tragic. The Muslim faith is always important but the families vary in their understanding of what it means for their lives. Across the stories there is a focus on the role of women.



Heart Lamp

Banu Mushtaq



¶ On days when it was impossible for Shaziya to wake up in time for the dawn namaz, she would blame it on her high blood pressure, and had a habit of saying she had no peace because of those damn tablets. ¶ Her mother used to say, 'All this is Shaitan's game. Shaitan comes early in the morning, presses your legs, drapes a blanket around you, pats you back to sleep...' *Translated by Deepa Bhasthi*
Winner of an English PEN Award
Winner of the 2025 International Booker Prize

And Other Stories, 2025

Winner, The International
Booker Prize 2025

With thanks to the Hawthornden Foundation



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Banu Mushtaq is a lawyer and writer. She writes in Kannada, the language in which she was educated. It is also the language she uses at work and when she is out and about in Karnataka. At home she speaks Dakhni. She lives in Madikeri in the south of Karnataka.

She was inspired to start writing by the Bandaya movement: in Karnataka in the 1970s and 1980s people who would not normally think of themselves as writers were encouraged to write about their own lives and experiences. The translator explains more in her note, which starts on page 209 of the book.

Between 1990 and 2023 Banu Mushtaq published six collections of short stories. She has also published a novel, essays and poetry. The stories in this anthology were chosen from her published work and translated into English by Deepa Bhashti.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Deepa Bhashti is a journalist and literary translator. She lives in Hassan, a town about 100km from Madikeri. She and the author speak different dialects of Kannada. In 2024, Bhashti won the 2024 English PEN Translates award, for her translation of Banu Mushtaq's *Haseena and Other Stories*.

RESOURCES

[The Booker Library reading guide](#)

[The Booker Library interview with Banu Mushtaq and Deepa Bhashti](#)

[The Paris Review](#)

[Words Without Borders](#)

[Prospect Magazine](#)

[Watch Ambika Mod read from *Heart Lamp*](#)

'The tight-gauged texture of the intricate translation creates a most invigorating reading experience, rare nowadays in English-language fiction.'

International Booker
Prize Judges

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

The World of the Book

- What clues does the author to give us to locate the families, socially and geographically, in these different stories?
- In what different ways are the women dressed?
- What are the factors in these stories that keep women trapped?
- Is there one single thing that would empower the women in these stories?

Wider Themes

- Do these stories have universal themes, even though they are set in a particular part of the world?
- Do you think literature can have a political impact?

Reading the World

- In her Translator's note at the back of the book, Deepa Basthi explains that, although she lives in Karnataka like the author, their linguistic, religious and social backgrounds are very different.
 - Do you think this matters?
- Would you be interested in reading other stories translated from Kannada?
- Would you be interested to learn Kannada?
- Not many books have been translated into English from Kannada. If you were to choose one English book to represent English literature internationally, what would it be?

One more thing

- If there had been an introduction to these stories, what questions would you have liked it to have answered?

FURTHER READING

:

The God of Small Things

by Arundhati Roy

Fate's Game and Other Stories

by Kodagina Gouramma, translated from Kannada by Deepa Bhasthi

A Room of One's Own

by Virginia Woolf

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION – SPECIFIC STORIES

STONE SLABS FOR SHAISTA MAHAL

- What immediately strikes you about the language?
 - Does it read as if someone is telling you a story?
 - How does it do this?
- Can you spot words that are not in English?
 - Do you think you can understand them?
- On page 2, the narrator says this about her husband: 'By now you must have understood what my relationship with Mujahid is. At the same time, you must have understood what I think about all this.'
 - What has she told us about what she thinks?
- If you were in this story, would you rather spend time
 - in the town or the countryside?
 - Inside the houses or in the gardens?

FIRE RAIN

- What does this story tell you about the importance of property rights?
- What impression does the author give us of Usman Saheb?
 - Why are people scared of him?
 - Why do people communicate with their eyes around him?

BLACK COBRAS

- In this story, men and women occupy different spaces. What spaces do the women occupy? What about the men?
- Could you stage this story as a play? How would you do so?

'[W]hat strikes the most is the vivid imagery Mushtaq creates throughout the book, which takes you deep into the women's personal spaces. It reads as if one is inside the home, as a silent spectator, as events unfold.'

Shubhangi Shah, *The Week*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION – SPECIFIC STORIES

RED LUNGI, HIGH-HEELED SHOE & A TASTE OF HEAVEN

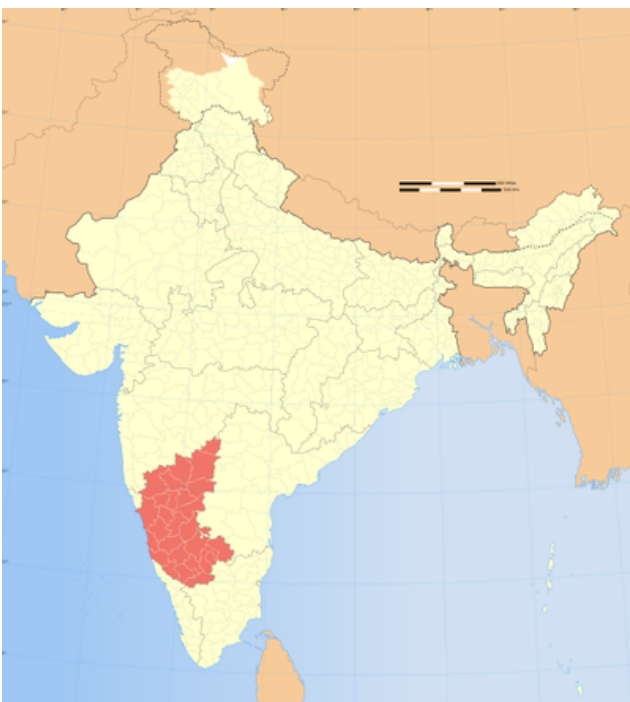
- What do these stories say about tradition and modernity?

THE ARABIC TEACHER, GOBI MANCHURI & SOFT WHISPERS

- How do the positions of the narrator in The Arabic Teacher and Ajji in Soft Whispers differ from that of most of the women in these stories?

HEART LAMP & BE A WOMAN ONCE, OH LORD!

- Why is 'Heart Lamp' placed at the centre of this collection and 'Be a Woman Once, Oh Lord!' at the end?



The state of
Karnataka in
India.