CHAPTER - VII

KUSUMA BALE: A PARALLAX VIEW ON THE ORIGIN OF UNTOUCHABILITY

INTRODUCTION

Seventies and eighties saw a spurt of activities in the socio-political scenario of Karnataka, which radically influenced the echelons of culture as well. Here was a new generation, of dalits and backward communities, who were neo-literate- thanks to governmental measures to promote education to all- and radical. They began to question the social inequalities, to which they were witnesses from close quarters, and raise their voice against the brutalities meted out to dalits. It is at this juncture B.Basavalingappa, a minister in the cabinet of Devaraj Urs, began to attack the decadent social system and gave a clarion call to his dalit brethren to rise unitedly in protest. He abhorred the holy scriptures and implored people to throw them in to drains. Kannada literature, at it existed then, also came under his attack for he called it boosa (animal fodder). It drew vehement protests from the general public, resulting in the minister’s resignation from the cabinet. This stirred the dormant psyche of dalits who began to get organized and build a socio-political movement to counter social injustice. Thus formed was Dalit Sangharsh Samiti (DSS) under the leadership of Prof. B.Krishnappa, Devanoora Mahadeva, Siddalingaiah and others. Mahadeva, an already accomplished writer by then, along with Siddalingaiah and others spearheaded a distinct school of literature in Kannada called ‘the dalita literature’ which sheltered hundreds of authors in due course. Kusuma bale, the novel
chosen for this study is not only an exemplary piece of art but also a document, which deals with the contemporary social realities of the seventies.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Devanoora Mahadeva, born on 10-06-1948 at Kavalande in Chamarajanagar district, is regarded as a front-runner of dalit literature in Kannada. With ‘Dyavanooru’, a collection of short stories published in 1973, Mahadeva created a new trend altogether with his fresh, realistic and humanistic approach on the dalit life style. An eye opener it was, against the evils perpetrated by the privileged class over the weaker sections of the society. True, the themes of these stories were dealt with by the earlier writers also. But coming from a dalit, they looked original and true to life. The characters in them spoke the native lingo, unlike the bookish version the readers hitherto were used to. With its new style and approach in the field of creative expression, Dyavanooru earned high critical acclaim to its author.

His next work ‘Odalala’ stupefied the Kannada literary world. A shocking revelation of the extent of poverty and hunger that existed in the society, the novelette successfully juxtaposed the rich and the poor, where a simple theft by the latter to satiate their hunger is seen as a heinous crime by the system. The pangs of hunger prompt a character to thieve a half-full bag of groundnuts from the nearby factory, and the starved family consumes the whole of it overnight leaving no evidence whatsoever to prove such an event took place. The novelette highlights the hypocrisy and insensitivity that characterized the system, which turns out to be a mockery of its own
aspirations. For the relevance of its theme, excellent narration and the humanist approach, Odalala went on to receive wide appreciation by the critics, literateurs and the readership. Also, It won the coveted award from the Bharatiya Bhasha Parishat, Kolkata, in the year 1984.

Kusuma Bale is a short novel written by Mahadeva published in the year 1984. Like his two works cited above, Kusuma Bale also received a very high critical acclaim and is regarded as one of the best novels produced in Kannada. The narration technique adopted in the novel is of folk mythology. With a simple, but not linear, story line, the novel picturises the dalit life style in its originality and mulls over the possible causes of its degeneration over a period of time. With the time span spreading to times immemorial, the novel assumes the status of a purana with the present society attempting to rewrite it. For its unique theme and poetic expression, Kusuma Bale stands out from the other works of its genre – the novel. It went on to win the prestigious Central Sahitya Academy award for the year 1990.

Mahadeva has only three literary works to his credit, each of them being a significant contribution to Kannada literature. Brevity is the soul of his creations, which had a cutting edge over other writers.¹ Kusumabale is a novel consisting of only 77 pages. When published in entirety, his total contributions ran to about 187 pages only. But the quality, relevance and efficacy-wise, his creations, mesmerized a whole generation irrespective of one’s origin, dalit or otherwise.

Speaking on Mahadeva, P.Lankesh, an eminent writer and journalist, summarises his persona as under:
‘As I have known for the last 25 years, Devanoora Mahadeva is (outwardly) an idle, indecisive and a laid back individual. But deep inside he is sharp, sensitive and a judicious human being. His affectionate nature and his love for life far surpass the aforesaid traits.’

Prof. C.Naganna sums up Devanoora Mahadeva as a wonderful combination of literary talent and social awareness expressed through his stories and other writings.

Mahadeva has assumed the status of a cult figure not only for his contributions to Kannada literature but also in the arena of social movements. On the lines of the Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra and the viplabi movement in Andhra Pradesh, Prof. B.Krishnappa and Devanoora Mahadeva founded the Karnataka Dalit Sangharsha Samiti, popularly known as the DSS. The organization progressed to become an effective socio-cultural and political forum for the dalits of Karnataka. The seemingly voiceless came to be vocal when fighting against the atrocities on fellow dalits and demanding for a dignified existence.

Mahadeva has been an invitee to the international writers programme held at Iowa in 1989. He presided over the Bandaya sahitya sammelana held in the year 1979. He has received awards from both Central Sahitya Academy and Karnataka Sahitya Academy. He is that rare individual who resigned from his job as a lecturer in the Central Institute of Indian languages to pursue the life of an agriculturist.

**KUSUMA BALE**

The novel Kusuma Bale was published in the year 1984. Like all his other works, Mahadeva employs the dialect spoken in places in and around
Nanjangud to a mesmerizing effect. The narration, style, technique and aspirations of the novel contribute to its beauty binding the reader to a prolonged spell of aesthetic gratification.

T.P. Ashoka, noted critic, describes Kusuma Bale as a work that employed the aspects of folk mythology.

‘Kusuma Bale is nearer to the form, style and aspirations of a purana. It is a kind of Janapada purana (folk mythology). Mahadeva is not telling the story of dalits in Kusuma Bale. One feels he is telling a dalita purana in it.’

Famous writer and critic G.S. Amoora describes Kusuma Bale as ‘a piece of literature which depicts the cultural aspects of an entire community entirely. Writers who have had the grasp of the culture of a community are very rare. If we have to look for comparison, we may have look in to the works of African writers like Vole Soyenka.’

Another noted critic prof. G.H. Nayak opines that the publication of Kusumabale heralds an important literary event in the context of creative expression in Kannada. It’s constitution, the dialect, nature of narration; aspect and the stance are not only new and fresh, but unusual too, which poses hosts of questions regarding the central concern, communication and the shape of the novel itself. Prof. Nayak wonders whether the basic problem in communication is due to the language used or because of the strangeness of the concept itself.

The novel not only depicts the contemporary realities of dalit life but also aspires to catch its essence by employing the folk, mythological, and legendary realms, which have been, etched deep in the dalit psyche.
While doing so, Mahadeva highlights the fact that ‘the dalit life has a tradition. It has the local wisdom obtained from that tradition. Further, it has that resolve to live and have compassion for life.’

The novel Kusuma Bale has received high critical acclaim and has been an oft-quoted literary work for its poetic expression, brevity of description and humour mixed narration. Some of the personalities appearing in the novel are from real life. It is an attempt to tell history since time immemorial to the contemporary concisely. Certain notions appearing in the novel are debatable, particularly, the ‘nanni’ (utterances of a spirit through a man) of Kariyayya as regards to the origin of untouchability, which looks as over-simplification of a historical phenomenon. Yet, the novel attracts an avid reader by its beauty in style and expression.

Kusuma Bale has received the top governmental award for a literary work ie. the Central Sahitya Academy award in the year 1990.

**STORY**

In author’s own words, the novel does not have a simple story line. Noted critic T.P. Ashoka concurs with the author’s statement when he states that ‘Kusuma Bale has more or less shelved the obligation of having a story line.’ Elsewhere, Prof.Rajendra Chenni identifies the underlying and repetitive theme dealt with in the novel is that of ‘illicit relation between the males and females belonging to upper and lower castes’ The recurring theme here is the blossoming of natural love irrespective of differences-social, economical and cultural. As Ki.Ram. Nagaraja, a noted critic, opines as under:
‘The novel accepts mixing of castes; in a way we all accept it. Opposition to such mixing is only mental; not physical.’

Aforesaid views notwithstanding, the novel has not one but several stories in its fold. The stories are so inter-twined, the novel, with its plots and sub-plots summarized, gives a vivid and wholesome picture of dalit society.

The main plot narrates a story that runs through four generations beginning with Akka Mahadevamma to Kusum, the latter’s name appearing as the title of the novel.

Akka Mahadevamma, widowed and the mother of a six-year-old son named Yada, comes to the household of Basappa Somi for a share in the family property of her late husband. She, a Lingayath by caste, is suspected to have had an illicit relation with a dalit bonded labourer working at the household of Basappa Somi and had borne a son through that relation twelve months after the death of her husband. Incensed by the adultery, Basappa Somi and his brother Siddura throw Akka Mahadevamma and her infant son out of the house. Insulted and humiliated, Akka Mahadevamma stays put in the very place she was thrown in to making her livelihood through a small hotel selling tea and snacks. The business grows gradually and so her son Yada. A grown up Yada amasses wealth, through means considered unethical, with active support from Akka mahadevamma.

Yada’s son Somappa marries Mallajamma, a born orphan but reared by an upper caste family, and inherits the property of his parents as well as the in-laws. Of the nine children the couple has, eight were sons and a lone daughter. That daughter’s name is Kusum, who has presently delivered a
son. Despite Kusuma and her husband being fair in colour, the infant is black. It clearly indicated that the boy was born of an illicit relation between Kusuma and a dalit youth named Chennarasu. An upset Somappa has the dalit youth murdered causing anguish to Kusuma and the parents of Chennarasu. The Dalits of the village organize themselves under the leadership of real life dalit leaders of statewide standing, open a branch of Dalit Sangharsha Samiti in the village, and take out a huge procession to herald that the days of silent subjugation were over.

On a broader perspective, the story of Kusuma Bale is regarded as the story of mankind itself (Manukulada kate), the inference being that the spirit of love is oblivious to man-made differences, and takes on its own course irrespective of the hurdles put forth by the society.

The novel houses several sub-plots, which unlike the main story are contemporary.

Parallel to the story of Kusuma, Kempi, a dalit woman resorts to extra marital affairs to have a child, her husband being not potent enough to produce one. Turamma, mother of Kempi, has the knowledge of magical rituals which she uses to protect her daughter’s offspring. There is Eery, the poor cousin of Kempi, who struggles to protect her son from wasting away due to an unknown disease. Chenna, an educated dalit youth lives on the earnings of his bonded labour brothers and the old parents but sports a moustache, wears trendy clothes in order to make the barely educated but rich upper caste people jealous. And there is the street smart Garsidda Mava, who hoodwinks upper caste landowners with his robust physique and a nonchalant mannerism. Guilty of having stolen 16 tender coconuts from the
plantation of an upper caste individual, Garsidda is tied to the ‘Nyaya Kamba’ and is beaten up. This incident leads to dalits organising themselves and hold a procession demanding abolition of the system of bonded labour. Mulluru Nagaraja, B.Krishnappa, Devanoora mahadeva, Siddhalingaiah and some others depicted in the novel are from the real life.

Jotammas (spirits of dead women) give essential links to the story line and an inanimate object such as the bedstead too participates in the narration.

One general observation on the novel is that it does not have a centre. Ki.Ram. Nagaraja opines that ‘Not having a centre in itself is a metaphor, which till the very end represents the tragedy of a broken culture. The novel has many sub-plots in it. Since it is a collection of plots and sub-plots, it will not be proper to expect that it should have had a centre.’ Another noted critic, T.P.Ashoka cites that ‘There is no compulsion on the novel to regulate its proceedings on the lines of a beginning, a middle and an end…. Questions like why the novel is loosely knit, why it does not have a centre that holds the proceedings are not simply the questions related to aesthetics. They have social, cultural and political dimensions…”

SETTING

The novel is set in a remote village, unnamed though, in Nanjangud taluk of Chamarajanagar district. We, on the basis of descriptions in his works, may presume that the geographical location of his works is a village named Devanooru. Connectivity of the village with the outside world is limited, despite buses plying to and fro to nearby towns. Only, the moneyed
and educated commute in them for attending their personal chores elsewhere rarely.

The village is characterized by caste and class divisions. Lingayats owning most of the cultivable lands and plantations have relatively comfortable existence. Dalits serve as their labourers. The labour included those working on daily wage basis and also on bondage. Dalits being poor live at minimum subsistence levels.

The religion has a strong presence in the novel. Lingayats have a matha and the dalits a Marigudi. The matha has become a haven for the idlers from upper castes. It also has a pillar of justice to which the guilty is tied and beaten up. Hefty fines are imposed on the guilty. The general environment obtained at the village is that of suspicion and hatred. Justice in such a situation is coloured and partisan. Intervention of police for an enquiry is treated as an insult to the village justice system. The dalits believed and practiced occult for safe guarding the lives of their young.

Education is slowly beginning to bring about awareness among dalits. Their general perception towards the society is undergoing a change. They are slowly learning to organize themselves so that they can fight for social justice unitedly. The elderly dalits are illiterate and are used to accept their social position as a fait-accompli. The upper caste people with their limited education refuse to do away with their pre-concieved notions on caste. Nanjamma, mother of Devanoora Mahadeva recalls that ‘Lingayats used to wash their hands with cow-dung and water, at the slightest touch from us. Brahmins ran to a farther distance while ordering us to keep away.’

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FEUDAL SET UP INDICATED IN THE NOVEL

A novel that is highly poetic and full of metaphors and symbolic representations, Kusuma Bale is not explicit in its details of the feudal society obtained at the village. It indicates the existence of such a society, with its composition of landowners, landless, wage earners and serfs. The financial disparity is marked. The rich lived in big houses and the poor in hutments. The caste and class divisions also are sharp. Sexual relations between the superior caste women and low caste men were a taboo. Chenna, a dalit youth who dares to have an affair with Kusuma is murdered. Dalits worked as bonded labourers in the households of the rich.

Russian economist Proudhan has made an interesting observation, which states that all property is stolen and all rich men are thieves. The modus operandi adopted by Yada supported by Akka Mahadevamma is nothing but thieving of others’ property. He earns money, to begin with, stealing the entire herd of cattle left under his supervision by the villagers. Later, he joins the gang, which dealt in counterfeit currency, scares them off with a false alarm that the police are out to arrest them and usurps the proper currency meant to be invested in the trade. He arranges the marriage of his son Somappa with Mallajamma, an orphan girl brought up by a rich couple, and ensures that his son got the inheritance from both sides.

Somappa grows in to the status of a feudal lord with vast areas of land, valuables and social standing. He lives in a big house with a very big door which creeks with a big noise, ‘as if the enter village yawned’ every time when opened or closed. He has political ambitions too. As groundwork to his political career, he arranges for the distribution of saris to
the villagers on the auspicious day of sankranti. He is upset with the illicit relation between his daughter Kusuma and the dalit youth Chenna and arranges for the latter’s murder.

Basappa Somi and Siddura deny parting with the rightful share of their late brother in the family property, to his wife Akka Mahadevamma. They throw her out of their house. The reason ascribed is that Akka mahadevamma suspectedly had an illicit relation with a dalit bonded labourer of the house hold and had given birth to a boy after 12 months of the demise of her husband.17

The landowners of the villagers, barely literate, treated the landless with disdain. They are not tolerant of a dalit youth riding a bicycle or dressing neatly or even wearing a moustache. They, with their worldly necessities met, wander away their time by assembling in the Matha, playing cards and or making unsavoury comments on others. The Matha had a ‘Nyaya Kamba’ (justice pole) to which the guilty were tied and beaten up. Payment of a fine to the Matha would release the guilty from the Kamba.

With a story line spreading over to four generations, Kusuma Bale records the continuity of oppression of the weak and down trodden, with the upper classs holding on to its status through unethical means. However, the novel ends on a positive note that with increased awareness, and organized resistence, exploitation may take a back seat in the coming days.

LAND HOLDINGS

The novel does not specify the details of land holdings of the villagers. The broad indications available in it suggest that the upper caste people held most of the lands available in the village. Somappa is seen as a
rich and affluent man having sizeable land holdings, cattle and a very big house the gate of which would allow an elephant to pass through. With his affluence, he is thinking of entering into active politics, the ground work for which has already begun with his distribution of saris on the Sankranti day. The other upper caste people are indicated to have lands and cattle. With good surplus derived from their cultivational activities, some of them while away time by idling, in gossip, smoking and gambling.

FEUDAL RELATIONS

As seen earlier, there are only two blocks in the village society: 1. The landowners, few marginal landholders and 2. the landless. The owners have cultivable lands, coconut plantations on which they employed the landless on daily wages or as bondage. In the latter case they use the labour against a loan availed by his parents or fore fathers or on a current arrangement by paying the family a fixed amount for a variable tenure of service. Chenna’s mother suggests that they can send another of their sons as bonded labourer and get some money to go to Bombay to see their eldest son thereat. One upper caste land owner says that all elected legislators and parliamentarians belonging to the scheduled castes were the bonded labourers of Indira Gandhi, the then prime minister of India! They ridicule Chenna’s father that such being the case why will Indira Gandhi be interested in abolishing the bonded labour?

The plight of landless and dalits is attributable to following factors:

1. Encroachment of forest areas and grazing fields by the rich leaving the people depended on them in the lurch.
2. Forefietment of lands belonging to dalits by the rich against loans given to them.
3. The decline of village industries.
4. Lack of education.

The novel has a strong undertone that property accumulated over the generations could be ill gotten indicating that the affluent robbed off the assets of the innocent and weak.

CASTE AND UNTOUCHABILITY

The novel highlights the social divide between the upper castes and dalits. The former lived a life of relative affluence vis-à-vis the penury of the latter. The broad aspiration of the novel is to highlight the instinct of love between men and women that happen naturally without caring for the man made social restrictions like caste and class. Generations pass by, but the nature does not change. Relations that surpass all such restrictions do happen since time immemorial to the contemporary society. Akka Mahadevamma is suspected to have borne a child from the dalit bonded labourer 12 months after the death of her husband. Kusuma has a baby from Chenna, a dalit youth. Kempi has relations with other boys in order to conceive and deliver a child. Mallajamma is the result of an illicit relation her unknown mother may have had before marriage. In all these instances the offspring so gotten is not abandoned. Except Akka Mahadevamma other women are not punished. But Chenna, lover of Kusuma, is murdered signifying the intolerance of the society to ‘pratiloma’ relations.

The irony, however, is that the offspring born out of such socially unacceptable relations, try to hang on to the caste in which they were
brought up. Yada, son of Akka Mahadevamma, is brought up as an upper caste boy. He arranges for his son’s marriage with an adopted daughter of an upper caste couple. Mallajamma suspected to have been born out of wedlock survives as a worthy wife to Somappa. Somappa marries off his daughter Kusuma to a caste equal and the boy born to Kusuma through her liaison with a dalit youth is retained. The boy, once grown up, will be donning his upper caste mantle in due course.

Somappa is the rich upper caste man who lives in a large house the entrance of which would allow an elephant to pass through. He has political ambitions and spends money for distributing 1000 saris to the poor. In order to retain his caste and class standing in the society, he arranges for the murder of Chenna.

The upper caste landowners have cultivable lands and plantations. They had a matha to cater to their religious identity. The matha had a pillar of justice called Nyaya Kamba. The guilty is tried by tying him to it, in order to get a confession and a fine, which goes to the coffers of the matha.

The upper caste treats the dalits with suspicion and contempt. They are intolerant of dalits wearing good dress, sporting moustache and riding bicycle. One character alleges that dalits have become such a menace to the village society, that a decision should be taken forthwith either dalits or upper the caste lived in the village. The intolerance expressed by an idler to amasa’s bicycling bears evidence to the fact:

‘See, see, the impertinence of that holeya! Doesn’t even have means for proper food to fill his belly but rides the bicycle stylishly, bends it like a snake just to make us see him. His forearms should be cut and thrown hither
and thither so that the bastard should not be able to hold the handle of a bicycle.'²²

There is instant ridicule to the dalit participation in the protest march demanding for the abolition of bonded labour:

‘If one asked “do you know brother, that your caste people are abandoning the jeeta(bonded labour)?” the other ridiculed that” would we be in a position to talk to or even see you holeyas after that?”. Some other fellow muses that” After abandoning the jeeta these holeys will have (the luxury of) ghee and rice to eat’²³

Violation of caste code by a dalit is viewed seriously. Chenna is brutally murdered for having a relation with Kusuma which results in the birth of a child.

The novel has two Brahmin characters in it namely, Madhvacharya, a retired teacher and his daughter Bhagawati. The author has deliberately used the caricature mode in order to bring in the desired effect. These characters are representative of their social standing. Madhvacharya is poor and totally dependent on his monthly pension. The pension he gets is hardly sufficient to make his ends meet. He has a marriageable daughter at home, already 34 year old and squint eyed, a burden on his shoulders. He is looking for suitable match for his daughter and requests channa to ‘look for a suitable Brahmin groom’, if he knew any among his friends. He also adds that his daughter ‘has not come of age yet.’²⁴ Not being married, Bhagawati is languishing at her home fantasizing that she is having coitus with the dalit orphan, Amasa, during her periods. Her logic is that on the days of periods,
she too is ‘hole’ (impure) and to have coitus with a holeya on those days will not be an ‘adharma’! (sin)

Like all other novels chosen for our study, the society at Dyavanooru too was stratified as per the norms of chaturvarna. Madhvacharya feels himself superior to all other castes by virtue of his being Brahmin. Next as per social heirarcy come the Lingayaths, who have a comfortable existence with the income of their cultivable lands and cattle. Not much has been mentioned about the other sudra castes in the novel. The dalits, next caste groups mentioned, are divided in to left and right as madiga and holeya respectively.

The caste element does not only divide the living characters but the dead as well. The jotammas, spirits of dead women are identified on the basis of castes they belonged to when they lived. They are described as the jotammas of harora hatti (Brahmin house), holara marigudi (mari temple belonging to holeyas),Toorara hatti (toora house), dodora hatti (house of superiors ) and so on.

A character in the novel, Kuriyayya, under the spell of the spirit of torara hatti jotamma, puts forth an interesting argument as regards to the origin of untouchability. According to his ‘nanni’ (utterances of a spirit that had entered his body), the dalits long time ago indulged in kidnapping and violating the upper caste women. When they came back, the good-hearted upper caste people excused the act but banished the holeyas out of the village as a punishment to their misdeed.

‘Some bastards of our caste used to lift the upper caste women. Where to? To the ravines of the hillocks. Understood? They stayed with them for
some time. Understood? Then the bastards used to come back to the village. The upper caste people were really good- hearted. That’s why they are called as upper caste people you know. Are they called upper caste for nothing? Listen now. What those upper caste people told then was ‘you see folks, whatever done is done. It can’t be reversed. But, for the mistakes you have committed, you people will have to stay outside the village and attend to the jobs, which we order on you. Now, go live somehow.’

The character further suggests that the blood of the upper caste has a phenomenal memory. The moment they see the ‘hole madugadi (holeyas and madigas – the dalits in toto) their blood recalls the history as if it was a cinema and starts boiling.

‘Oh, the forefathers of these whole madugadi lifted the women belonging to our upper castes. These whole madugadi are their descendents.’

The statement appears not only illogical but misleading -refuting unreasonably, the socio-cultural and anthropological theories put forward hitherto. Noted critic and rationalist Rajendra chenni observes:

‘Mahadeva seems to be corroborating with this traditional ‘nanni’ rather than understanding the caste system in the light of modern day observations.’

T.P. Ashoka counters Rajendra Chenni’s argument as according to him Mahadeva does not either corroborate or reject the ‘nanni’ of Kuriyayya but just indicates it as one of the possibilities.
Even this argument is untenable as it is now conclusively proved by scholars like D.D.Kosambi that the origin of untouchability could be traced to the times of Aryan invasion where the defeated tribals and weak natives were subjugated and condemned to be unworthy of social intercourse in the new found social order. Noted critic G.H. Nayak observes that ‘Kuriyayya in fact is boasting of the courage and virility of his ancestors who took to defile the upper caste women.’ Juxtaposing Garesidmava’s abstain behavior and Kuriyayya’s ‘Nanni’ Prof. Nayak ascribes the ‘Nanni’ to the illusory aggrandizement of the virile behavior of the ancestors and its link to the subsequent misfortune that befell on dalits.

Another opinion suggests that ‘At the time of their integration in to the caste system, the holeyas continued to remain Neolithic primitive agriculturists whose fortunes were under decline due to the destruction of their water sources and usurpation of their lands.’

The caste factor is significant in rescuing Akka Mahadevamma and Yada from sure destitution. They survived, even after being thrown out by Basappa somi and siddura, by selling tea and snacks – an opportunity unavailable to dalits. Kusuma’s relation with Chenna ends in the murder of the latter but the former is spared as she belonged to the upper caste family.

‘The upper castes pardon their women but are eager to punish the low caste men.’ T.P. Ashoka observes that most of the man-woman relations in kusumabale are outside the bond of marriage. He opines that intolerance for such relations is observed only in upper cast characters but dalit’s response to such relations is pro-life.
Overtly, there is no practice of untouchability in the village, which may be due to the awareness that dalits enjoyed the constitutional protection and such practices were punishable by law. However, it is discernable by the fact that the dalits lived outside the village. There is strong sense of hatred and ridicule by the upper class on the dalits.

Nanjangud taluk has in its history a series of atrocities on the dalits by the upper caste Hindus. The murder of Chenna (name changed) is a real life incident which the author himself has acknowledged. Such murders were common place and are in vogue for a long time anywhere and at any point of time in the Indian history. The non-eraseability of the blood spot symbolically represents the continuation of such atrocities by the upper caste people on the downtrodden communities.

The novel ends on a positive note that the downtrodden have at last begun to organize themselves and fight the injustice and cruelty to which they were subjected hitherto. The protest march organized to demand the abolition of ‘jeeta’ (bonded labour), although ridiculed by the upper caste, comes as a welcome development in that direction.

SPIRITS, OCCULTS, RITUALS AND RELIGION

The nether world has a strong presence in the forms of jotammas. These spirits give decisive turns to the plot and are seen to be making merry of their ability to interfere with the lives of the living ones. Though a narrative technique, the presence of these spirits provides an interesting angle to the plot. It is through them we come to know of the illicit affair of Kusuma and Chenna. The torar hatti jotamma’s hutment was the place where the lovers met. She is also the witness to the murder of Chenna whose
blood seems to be visible everywhere and is uneraseable. This jotamma enters in to the body of old Kuriyayya and gives out a nanni, which is thoroughly disputed.

Even after their death, the jotammas are known by their castes. They are status conscious - the superior prevailing over the inferior.

The occult has a marked presence in the form of strange rituals undertaken by Turamma and Eery. Through series of visits to the gods and goddesses Turamma extracts a promise from the latter that her daughter Kempi’s miscarriages will stop forthwith. She further strengthens such a prospect by involving herself in occult practices. She suspects that Ididevi (the daughter of the goddess of fate) will tamper with what is written by Idiyamma( goddess of fate) and undertakes series of rituals to prevent it. She ties the holy thread around the house, a magically empowered lemon and an old footwear on to the outer door, holds a ‘maru javuli kaddi ‘(an occult empowered stick) and a ‘nagara betta’ (a snake like stick which is believed to have magical powers) and sits guarding Kempi’s baby so that no evil spirit does any harm to the infant.

Elsewhere Eery performs a ritual of ‘exposing’ her son to an elaborate meal so that the latter who is suffering from acute malnutrition and under-development will come around and become healthy. However, the boy dies by the ‘shock of happiness ‘ seeing the delicacies set out for him.

The aforesaid rituals were common practice in the social situation described in the novel. The author admits to having heard and seen such practices and being curious on such phenomenae.
Religion too has presence in the form of matha meant for the upper castes. Although a haven for the idle, it has a nyaya kamba (justice post) to which an accused is tied up and beaten. Hefty fines are imposed on the guilty. Such fines went in to the coffers of the matha. The low caste has Marigudi where they assembled and took important decisions. The villagers’ faith is so strong that even the protest march starts with the breaking of a coconut.

CONCLUSION

Kusuma bale as a literary work has received tremendous applause for its unusual but mesmerizing narrative, deft handling of the theme and above all the crude social realities depicted in it. U. R. Anantha murthy, noted Kannada writer, highlights that on the writing of Mahadeva where ‘banal events of our day-to-day existence, which otherwise would have been dismissable as trivial, revel. Dining, the most mundane activity, appears as a ritual equivalent to that of an yajna’\(^36\) P.Chandrika, appreciatingly observes ‘For Mahadeva, Writing or speaking, are meditative as well as conscious states.’\(^37\) Elsewhere T.P. Ashoka says ‘Mahadeva is capable of extracting a form from the formless’\(^38\)

There are a few dissenting notes on the work. P.Lankesh, noted thinker, writer, journalist said ‘I could not understand Kusuma bale and if I have to give an opinion from whatever little I have understood, it is not a meaningful work of art.’\(^39\) G. Rajashekhar says that ‘Kusuma bale is a work of bad faith.’\(^40\) Dalit writer Mullura Nagaraja goes a step further when he said that ‘if one takes out the artistic and beautiful language from it, the novel appeared as the ‘hanging post’ of dalits.’\(^41\) Readers in general observe
that the novel is not very communicative for there is no centre and does not adhere to a time frame.

The objections raised hereinabove are purely literary and do not relate to this study directly. What is important here is that the novel records contemporary realities of the seventies. The emergence of the neo-literate among dalits, their rebellion against social discrimination, formation of DSS for an organized fight for their rights stirred the society out of its slumber. The upper castes reacted to these developments rather violently. Intolerent of the newfound militancy among dalits and their growing political clout, upper castes inflicted several atrocities on dalits resulting in murder, mayhem, rape, torture and social ostracization. Incidents at Badanavalu, Bendigeri and Kambalapalli are some of the examples of such atrocities. The balance of justice did not always tilt in favour of the victims but in favour of perpetrators of the violence as well (as in the case of Kambalapalli where they went scot free for want of evidence).

No doubt, Kusuma bale is a serious creation of art, its contents and language not understood easily by an un-prepared reader, but is based on real life incidents and events with names of individuals and localities changed for obvious reasons. It ends positively with a demonstration against the system of bonded labour indicating that the days of silent subjugation were over. Bonded labour was later banned through legislation. Several other legislations such as the debt relief, the anti-atrocities act to protect dalits, restoration of dalit’s land and others fell in line. DSS went on to become a political force to be reckoned with and the general awareness among dalits improving in the years that ensued. It is in this perspective, the
novel Kusumabale is perceived as an important literary work, which is of historical importance.
FOOT NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. ‘महादेव इतिसंगत साडे धीरे धीरे आते आते संगीत समाधिवर्करणली जाते २५ अंशही राजस्थानेरसंह २०० संह मात्रलीले असले पुरुषाकाळ शक्तिरपरे २५ अंशही ज्युवाकाळ.’


2. ‘इतरे प्रथम काळ मध्ये रससंगत कालांतर तंत्रांतर अनेकांतर संसाधित्करण, तिनेकाळवरण. त्यातील हुष्ट, ज्येष्ठाद्वार द्विधासंस्त्र अति, तराचे नुसाराचे समाधित्करण एवं अनेकांतर कालांतर ऑपर. यांना काळांना गुरुसंस्त्रांना गुरुसंस्त्रांना गुरुसंस्त्रांना गुरुसंस्त्रांना गुरुसंस्त्रांना गुरुसंस्त्रांना गुरुसंस्त्रांना.


3. C.Naganna quoted by N.P.Shankaranarayana Rao in ‘Devanoora mahadeva’ p-27

4. ‘चंद्रेपं क्रियान्तरे रूपने व. जगन. जंगलावर जंगलावर अंकलित. अंतराव भेटीले एकाकाळात आणि. आकाळजने चंद्रेपं क्रियान्तरे व. जगन. जंगलावर जंगलावर अंकलित. अंतराव भेटीले एकाकाळात आणि. आकाळजने चंद्रेपं क्रियान्तरे व. जगन. जंगलावर जंगलावर अंकलित. अंतराव भेटीले एकाकाळात आणि. आकाळजने चंद्रेपं क्रियान्तरे व. जगन. जंगलावर जंगलावर अंकलित. अंतराव भेटीले एकाकाळात आणि. आकाळजने चंद्रेपं क्रियान्तरे व. जगन. जंगलावर जंगलावर अंकलित. अंतराव भेटीले एकाकाळात आणि. आकाळजने चंद्रेपं क्रियान्तरे व. जगन. जंगलावर जंगलावर अंकलित. अंतराव भेटीले एकाकाळात आणि. आकाळजने चंद्रेपं क्रियान्तरे व. जगन. जंगलावर जंगलावर अंकलित. अंतराव भेटीले एकाकाळात आणि. आकाळजने चंद्रेपं क्रियान्तरे व. जगन. जंगलावर जंगलावर अंकलित. अंतराव भेटीले एकाकाळात आणि. आकाळजने चंद्रेपं क्रियान्तरे व. जगन. जंगलावर जंगलावर अंकलित. अंतराव भेटीले एकाकाळात आणि. आकाळजने चंद्रेपं क्रियान्तरे व. जगन. जंगलावर जंगलावर अंकलित. अंतराव भेटीले एकाकाळात आणि. आकाळज


5. ‘कुशी किंवदंती कठी आणि नात्यसंगत स्थानेत रूपने अंकलित. अंतराव भेटीले एकाकाळात आणि. आकाळजने चंद्रेपं क्रियान्तरे व. जगन. जंगलावर जंगलावर अंकलित. अंतराव भेटीले एकाकाळात आणि. आकाळजने चंद्रेपं क्रियान्तरे व. जगन. जंगलावर जंगलावर अंकलित. अंतराव भेटीले एकाकाळात आणि. आकाळजने चंद्रेपं क्रियान्तरे व. जगन. जंगलावर जंगलावर अंकलित. अंतराव भेटीले एकाकाळात आणि. आकाळजने चंद्रेपं क्रियान्तरे व. जगन. जंगलावर जंगलावर अंकलित. अंतराव भेटीले एकाकाळात आणि. आकाळजने चंद्रेपं क्रियान्तरे व. जगन. जंगलावर जंगलावर अंकलित. अंतराव भेटीले एकाकाळात आणि. आकाळजने चंद्रेपं क्रियान्तरे व. जगन. जंगलावर जंगलावर अंकलित. अंतराव भेटीले एकाकाळात आणि. आकाळजने चंद्रेपं क्रियान्तरे व. जगन. जंगलावर जंगलावर अंकलित. अंतराव भेटीले एकाकाळात आणि. आकाळज

G.S.Amoora quoted by T.P.Ashoka in shatamanada sahitya vimarshe p-864

7. G.S. Amoora quoted by T.P. Ashoka in ‘Shatamanada Sahitya vimarshe’ p-865

8. Ibid


11. Rajendra Chenni quoted by T.P. ashoka op.cit p-866


14. ‘ಅ ರೋಗಿ ಮಾರುತನಿಂದ ಸಾಕ್ಷಿಸಿದ್ದೇಂದು, ಹಿಡಿಯಣೆ ವಿತ್ತಿಯಾಗಿ ಹೋಲುವಂದು’ ಇದುಪತ್ತನಂತಹ ಮಿತ್ತಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ನೀಲೆಮೂಲದ ನೌಕೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಎಳ್ಳಿಸಿ ಇದು ಅನ್ನ ಸಮರ್ಪಿಸದ್ದಲೇ. ಅನ್ನವು ಸರುಗಿದ್ದ, ಅನ್ನು ಉಪಯೋಗಿಸಿಯೇ ಇಲ್ಲೆ.


17. Ibid p-109-113

18. ‘ಕುಂಠೈ ಸೇರುತಿತುತಿ ಕೃಟೀತಲೇ...’ Ibid p-105

19. Ibid p-185

20. Ibid p-176

21. Ibid p-145

23. ‘ನನ್ನು ಕೃಷ್ಣಕು ಸಾರಂಧಾ ಪೇಸ್ಮಾಣೆ ಮುದ್ರಿಸಿರುತ್ತಾ ಮುಂದು ಪೇಸ್ಮಾಣೆ ಮತ್ತು ಅನುಕ್ರಮ ‘
ಪೇಸ್ಮಾಣೆ ಮೀಸಿರುತ್ತಾ ಮತ್ತು ಅನುಕ್ರಮ ಅವಳಿಸಿ, ಮದುವೆಯ ಮತ್ತು ಅನಂತರ’... ಇತ್ತೀಚಿರುತಿ
ನನ್ನು ಸ್ವತಂತ್ರ ನಿರ್ದೇಶಿಸಿ ಸಾರಂಧಾ’ Ibid p-177

24. Ibid p-156

25. Ibid p-157

26. ‘ನನ್ನೂ ಮಾಡಿ ಮಾರುತು ವಣ್ನಾಯಕ ಶಿಲ್ಪಿ ಭೇಟಿಯುತ್ತದೆ ಶಿಲ್ಪಿ ಮಾಡಿದ ಲೋಕ. ಕೂಡಾ ಹೊರತವಾಗಿ ಅದನ್ನು ಮಾಡಿದ್ದು, ಅದನ್ನು ಮಾಡಿದ್ದು ಎಂದು ದೃಷ್ಟಿಪಡಿಸಿದರು. ಇತ್ತೀಚಿರುತಿ ನೆರಳಿ ನು ಮಾಡಿ ವಣ್ನಾಯಕ ಶಿಲ್ಪಿಯನ್ನು ಕೊಡಿಕೊಂಡಿರುತ್ತಾ ಅದನ್ನು ಅವಳಿಸಿದರು. ಅದನ್ನು ಮಾಡಿದರು ಎಂದು ಮಾಡಿದರು, ಇವೆಲ್ಲವು ಮಾಡಿದರು. ಇತ್ತೀಚಿರುತಿ ವಣ್ನಾಯಕ ಶಿಲ್ಪಿಯನ್ನು ಕೊಡಿಕೊಂಡಿರುತ್ತಾ ಅದನ್ನು ಅವಳಿಸಿದರು. ಮಾಡಿದರು ಮಾಡಿದರು ಎಂದು ಮಾಡಿದರು, ಇತ್ತೀಚಿರುತಿ ನೆರಳಿ ನು ಮಾಡಿದರು. ಇತ್ತೀಚಿರುತಿ ನೆರಳಿ ನು ಮಾಡಿದರು. ಇತ್ತೀಚಿರುತಿ ನೆರಳಿ ನು ಮಾಡಿದರು. ಇತ್ತೀಚಿರುತಿ ನೆರಳಿ ನು ಮಾಡಿದರು ಎಂದು ಮಾಡಿದರು. ಇತ್ತೀಚಿರುತಿ ನೆರಳಿ ನು ಮಾಡಿದರು. ಇತ್ತೀಚಿರುತಿ ನೆರಳಿ ನು ಮಾಡಿದರು.

Nanni of Kuriyayya in Kusuma Bale,’ Devanoora Mahadeva avara kritigalu’
Patrike prakashana 1997  p-170

27. ‘ನನ್ನು ಮಾಡಿ ಮಾರುತು ವಣ್ನಾಯಕ ಶಿಲ್ಪಿ ಭೇಟಿಯುತ್ತದೆ ಶಿಲ್ಪಿ ಮಾಡಿದ ಲೋಕ. ಕೂಡಾ ಹೊರತವಾಗಿ ಅದನ್ನು ಮಾಡಿದ್ದು, ಅದನ್ನು ಮಾಡಿದ್ದು ಎಂದು ದೃಷ್ಟಿಪಡಿಸಿದರು. ಇತ್ತೀಚಿರುತಿ ನೆರಳಿ ನು ಮಾಡಿದರು. ಇತ್ತೀಚಿರುತಿ ನೆರಳಿ ನು ಮಾಡಿದರು. ಇತ್ತೀಚಿರುತಿ ನೆರಳಿ ನು ಮಾಡಿದರು. ಇತ್ತೀಚಿರುತಿ ನೆರಳಿ ನು ಮಾಡಿದರು. ಇತ್ತೀಚಿರುತಿ ನೆರಳಿ ನು ಮಾಡಿದರು. ಇತ್ತೀಚಿರುತಿ ನೆರಳಿ ನು ಮಾಡಿದರು. ಇತ್ತೀಚಿರುತಿ ನೆರಳಿ ನು ಮಾಡಿದರು. ಇತ್ತೀಚಿರುತಿ ನೆರಳಿ ನು ಮಾಡಿದರು.

Ibid

28. Rajendr Chenni quoted in T.P.Ashoka’s article ‘Devanoora Mahadeva avara
Kusuma Bale’ in Shatamanada sahitya vimarshe pub. Karnataka sahitya academy
2001. P-870

29. Ibid

30. Chinna Swamy Sosale in ‘Dalitara Mele dourjanya’ pub.Kannada University,
Hampi 2006 YÂ-67
31. नंदरामरूपेंद्रन अभिनव भास्कर भावनाध्यक्ष, मारु, लक्ष्मण, वर्णन करते हैं कालिदास के ऐसे रूपों में नंदराम की रचनाओं के निष्पादन के साथ साथ ऐसे संस्कार, संस्कृति और साहित्य उत्पादन के निष्पादन। नंदराम का इतिहास में उनके नंदेश तथा समय के कारण उनके काम का अधिकांश महत्व है।

32. Ravi Kumar and Savita Kumari in their paper entitled ‘conditions of the land labourers in the princely state of Mysore: Impact of the British rule during 19th century’ Taken from ‘Studies in Karnataka History and culture- proceedings vol.vii, Karnataka History Congress, Mysore 2008 p-43


35. N P Shankaranarayana Rao’s ‘Devanoora Mahadeva’ Navakarnataka -2005 P- 81

36. U.R.Anantha Murthy quoted by G.H.Nayak in his article ‘aparoopada barahagara’ published in ‘Yara Jaftigoo sigada naviluglu’ by Abhinava’ four-monthly, May-September issue 1999 p-3 ‘श्य मुझे भी हुआ पूरा रामायण का हरे हरे हरे कि हुआ रामायण का हरे हरे हरे कि हुआ रामायण का हरे हरे हरे कि हुआ रामायण का हरे हरे हरे कि हुआ रामायण का हरे हरे हरे कि हुआ रामायण का हरे हरे हरे कि हुआ रामायण का हरे हरे हरे कि हुआ रामायण का हरे हरे हरे कि हुआ रामायण का हरे हरे हरे कि हुआ रामायण का हरे हरे हरे कि हुआ रामायण का हरे हरे हरे कि हुआ

38. T.P. Ashoka in his article ‘अमरकर्तातील नवंबर 2004, चोकसाहित्य नातिने’
op.cit p-21

39. P. Lankesh quoted by Devanoora Mahadeva in his reply ‘An open love letter to
two darlings’ published in ‘Yara Jaftigoo sigada navilugalu’ May-September
1999 issue of ‘Abhinava’ four-monthly. P-103

40. Ibid p-141

41. Ibid p-100

42. Ki. Ram. Nagaraj- In ‘Devanoora Mahadeva’ by N P Shankaranarayana Rao,
Published by Navakarnataka -2005 P-99