

Devanooru Mahadeva's *Kusumabale* as a Collage Novel

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Abstract

Kusumabale deals with the caste discrimination between the Lingayats and the Dalits. Besides, the upper caste people's verbal and physical ill-treatment of the Dalits, the implicit love affair between Channa (untouchable) and Kusuma (upper caste) and consequent murder of Channa form the plot of the novel. However, the author has adopted the narrative form collage in the substance and the mode to create this novel. There are many stories - the story of Akkamadevi, Yadda, Somappa, Kempa, Kittayya, Garesidda, Amasa, Dalit Organisation - and various modes - folk lore, flash back, verse and epigrams which are closely knit. As a result, the novel emerges as a collage.

Keywords: Collage, Dalit, Lingayat, Folk-lore, Epigram, Ill-treatment, Episode, Story, Personification, Narrative, *Kusumabale*, Yaada.

Introduction

Devanoora Mahadeva is a major and influential novelist in Kannada. He is also hailed as a powerful Dalit writer and activist. *Kusumabala* is his novel which is unique in many ways. It has been translated into English by Susan Daniel. This novel is a winner of Sahitya Akademi Award in 1990. In this article, an attempt is made to identify *Kusumabale* as a collage novel by highlighting the mixture of several stories and modes in the creation of it.

Plot

Though the novel contains the story of four generations i.e., Akkamadevi; her son, Yaada; his son Somappa; and his daughter, Kusuma, the main focus of the novel is the mysterious murder or vanishing of Channa who is believed to have had love-relation with Kusuma. While Channa is an untouchable in caste, Kusuma is a Lingayat. The inter-caste love as well as marriage is considered dishonour to the upper of caste of the two. As a result, the member of the lower caste is eliminated in the name of honour-killing. If the boy is of high caste, the girl is killed and vice versa. Channa's sudden disappearance causes a doubt that he must have murdered as he is an untouchable. However, the author does not confront the inter-caste love explicitly. He has handled in a very subtle way by giving only a obscure and twisting four.

Kusumabale as a Collage Novel

The genre of novel appeared after poetry and drama. Novel as an independent genre was written in the eighteenth century Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* published in 1714 and Richardson's *Pamela* published in 1740 are interchangeably known as the first novels in English. Though the mode and style of these novels is innovative, these novels laid down the convention of 'a single plot' in the plot construction. This convention was followed upto the twentieth century. It was also used as a model in the novel writing in the English colonies. The first Indian English novel *Rajmohan's Wife* and the novels of the 'trio' have also followed this convention. Indian novels translated into English are also in adherence to the same convention. In the wake of modern and postmodern Literature, an unprecedented device of mixing the stories of many generations and stylistic features with nonlinear structures was introduced. They are variously called hybridization, chutinification, picklisation, miclisation, intertextuality, collage and others.

Collage appeared as a form in art of picture. Pieces of various materials of several colours are mixed and assembled together to create a collage picture. We can not detect which is first or beginning or central and which is middle and which is last. All are mixed in such a tightly knit form, all seem equally same. Novel as a collage adopts the

same principle of collaborating episodes of several generations and characters as well as several narrative and linguistic styles. *Kusumabale* is a fine and fitting example of a collage.

Collage of Episodes in *Kusumabale*

Kusumabale is a collage of episodes of several characters. Four generations of Akkamadevi from her life to the life of her granddaughter Kusuma are combined with permutation and combination in addition to the episodes of Dalit characters in the novel. Instead of portraying their life in details, some bits and pieces taken from their life with which the episodes are framed.

The episode of Akkamadevi is the first one in the collage of episodes. Without any proper introduction, she is portrayed to appearing before her brother-in-law for the share of the property due to her on behalf of her late husband. It is just said that she has left her home and returned to her parent's house on the same day of the last rites of her husband. When she comes back to her house after six years after the death of her parents with her son Yadda who is said to have been born twelve months after the death of her husband, she is rejected by her brother-in-law who is the chief of their family. It is significant to note that her episode is narrated after a preview of the other character in bits and pieces. Her plead to her brother-in-law and his subsequent humiliation to her is depicted as follows:

Who could this be in widow's white?... A child on her hip and walking in the blazing sun... no spot of vermilion on her forehead arms bare and no bangles, the young and the old, men and women alike wondered, and following Akkamadevi around (keeping out of Basappa Somi's sight), they lined up outside his door-like black beads on a string. His body, mind, and might planted in the book of holy tales, Basappa Somi didn't raise his head. Then as if he chose when to, his head still bent, he said, "Who be you woman? A stranger like you, what brings you to our doors?" The air tightening around her and no one there breathing, Akkamadevi felt she was lucky he spoke that much. It's me, brother-in-law.... the dust on your feet.... she said. Basappa Somi's voice that didn't waver, said, 'If there's a word other than

brother-in-law, say it.'If she gave up on that word, what else would Akkamadevi say?As long as father and mother lived, they were my kin, ba now that father and mother are dead, I've been thrown on to the streets.... she wailed woefully. Hearing her, ... Basappa Somi waited patiently, and then said, Thats right, woman. What they did was right. Now go, 'Ah! Where'll I go to, brother-in-law...? Now on I'll drink the water that has washed your feet... and in my husband's name....Knowing the weeping and wailing wouldn't end with this 'Stop it, woman! You aren't fit to utter the word "husband" That was over with the last rites. What's over with cannot be got back. Be on your way,' Basappa Somi said. Then, when Akkamadevi tried to speak, his voice rising another notch. 'You may speak no more. May you not show yourself to our eyes,' he said. This shut Akkamadevi's mouth. (*Kusumabale*, 17-18)

The next episode is that of Yaada, son of Akkamadevi. She is resolved to take her life as a challenge and live there on her own. She raises a hut and begins to run a small shop to sell idli and tea. Yaada plans to take up the occupation of looking after the goats and sheep of the villagers on payment. In the course of time, many villagers come forward to leave their cattle to him. But he uses his master mind and sells them all in the cattle market but pretends to behave that he has been possessed by the demon to deceive the villagers. He succeeds in his drama:

But one fine day, coming to his mother, the grown boy Yaada said, 'Avva, avva, I don't know why, this work puts me out, and there's nothing I will. 'Dumbfounded, and lifting up a fearful eye, she said, ... Why my boy, this is new talk! What would you rather...?'Like this: a cow, a goat, a sheep, on a contract that graze and multiply them; and I'll prosper-just like that!"To bring this to pass, the mother-her saree pallu stretched over her arms-begged of the neighbors for a lease of their animals, and very soon a pen rose there. Grazing those animals earlier than those others and well before the sons of the bond servants could even stir, Yaada himself walked them through every patch of green that met the eye. The men now laughed among themselves. And though the price he quoted was

more than what they'd reckoned, see pro the animals were of good stocks, they counted out their money in crisp hundred rupee notes, and gladly took charge of the lot. [*Kusumabale*,42]

Yaada indulges in another cheating. The cloth auction takes place in the place during the festival days. The villagers assemble in the place of auction. The auctioneer is generally a juggler of words and thus influences the villagers to bid highest for the cloths/clothes. This is a rustic and rural marketing. Yaada participates in the bidding for a bedstead. He buys it for one fourth of a rupee and brings it home. One night three people from three states were carrying bags full of rupees are given shelter in his house and they are deceived of their money by mother and son.

In the next yet nonlinear episode, Somappa's life is given briefly. He is the only son of Yaada Gowda. When the latter comes across a girl identical his mother, he has got her married to his son. Her name is Mallajamma. She is also an adopted child. Their marriage is depicted in the novel as follows:

"Mallajamma, abandoned in a hospital by the hard-hearted woman who bore her, was a finger-sucking infant when she was taken in by a well-to-do childless couple. Charmed by Sivalinga, and named her 'Mallajamma'. Years later, the grown man Yaade Gowda, seeing the image of his own mother in her – her smile as she lay dying; and the days of exile she went through all for his sake coming back to his eyes – brings Mallajamma as wife to his son Somappa. The properties of the two families that lay in two directions grafted into one as a result, it swelled the family fortunes further." [*Kusumabale*59].

They be get eight children out of whom Kusuma is the only girl child. Her first five siblings and last sibling are brothers of whom the last is Prasad. He is described as an idiot boy. There is nothing about the first five brothers.

Kusuma and her brother Prasad belong the fourth generation of the genealogy of Akkamadevi. Kusuma has given birth to a baby girl. There is a reference to Kusuma's love with Channa. A woman called Singamma, who sells leafs and vegetables, has seen them together.

All these episodes are presented in the criss-cross and non-linear narration. They are also very short and brief. The narrative shows only one part of the life. Akkamadevi's life from her return to her husband's family to her son's amazing the bags of currency notes of three south Indians. Yaada Gowda's two instances namely his cheating of the villagers and the money of the three outsiders are the ones which are covered in the narrative. Somappa's marriage and his rest on the bedstead are the only events which are portrayed. As stated earlier, there is a very little about Kusuma presented in the novel although the novel carries her name as the title.

The other section of episodes is of the so called untouchable men and women. Channa is one of them. Although he is regarded as the central character, there is a very little about him. He has received some education and is a college drop-out. The author calls it sarcastically 'two lettered' degree.

Kittaya is another Dalit character whose episode is also included briefly in the novel. He is a vendor of neem and tamarind seeds which he collects from the people in the villages and sells them to the Muslim merchant. He uses a bicycle to visit the villages for buying the neem and tamarind seeds. He wears a dhoti while he moves around in his business. Turamma has got her daughter Kempa married to him. Kempa has got a step-sister called Eery. Their stories are depicted briefly in the novel.

There is also a story of Amasa. He collects the cloths used by women during the menstrual time and washes them. He resells them to the Muslim women. He also uses a bicycle to carry these cloths rather secretly. When the people ask him what he carries in the bad, he tells a lie that he takes the hides. He is a happy man riding his bicycle joyfully. The higher caste people feels irritated to him enjoying like this. Garesidda is yet another Dalit man in the novel. He is a habitual thief of the tender coconuts from the grove of the higher caste people. He is also punished by the villagers by tying him to a tree and flogging him. There are also portrayals of men in the novel. Nagaraju and Krishnappa are the two real life of Dalit leaders who are included in the narrative. Nagaraju is the representation of the actual Dalit who is known as "D.R. Nagaraj, who tried to revive the non-Vaidika knowledge

systems through his critical writings”[Shanbag, xx]. Krishnappa is Professor Krishnappa who created Dali Sangarsh Samiti (DSS) in Bhatravati and Shimoga and fought for the rights of untouchables. He is depicted to be participating the procession organized by the Samiti.

Collage of Technique

The author has adopted the most innovative technique of compiling several narratives devices resulting in a collage. The first device is that of a pre-view or a teaser of the entire novel in a nutshell. This is the unprecedented device in the history of novel not only in Indian Novel but also in the history of world novel. In the first chapter which is entitled ‘... and so it was’ the synopsis of the novel is given. The length of the chapter is only two passages in which the preview of the novel is presented. The next device used in the novel is the epigram or the title of each chapter. The author has played tricks in this device by either using the first line of the chapter fully or partially and sometimes an entirely difference caption for the chapters.

The next narrative device used in the novel is the folk tradition. The folklore of the *Jothammas* is employed here. The lamps assemble after their day today chores and share their joys. One of them from the house of Somappa tells about the response of Kusuma’s husband on his seeing their child . Again in the later part of the narrative, two *Jothammas* one from the upper caste house and the other from the Untouchable street meet and share their tales.

Somappa’s soul and bedstead are also personified. When Somappa falls asleep, his soul comes out and interacts with the bedstead. The bedstead narrates how Yaada Gowda bought the bedstead from the auction vender. ‘Worry’ is also personified. Turumma and Worry are seen interacting in the narrative.

Conclusion

The study of *Kusumabale* evinces that the novel is created in the structure of collage in terms of theme as well as technique. Although the murder of Channa is presupposed to be the central issue of the novel, it is not so in reality. The stories of Akkamadevi, Yaada, Somappa, Kusuma, Channarasa, Kittayya, Amasa, Garesidda, Kempri, Turumma are proportionately collaged in the narrative. All stories are assembled in such a way that no story more important than the other and there is chronological order of importance. The technique adopted in the novel is also of the collage. Several devices are integrated in narrating the episodes which creates the impression of collage. Thus *Kusumabale* can be considered a novel of collage.

References

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