

Social Realism and Dalit Sensibility in Devanoora Mahadeva's *Kusumabale*

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Abstract

The social and political content of a text enables one to have an understanding of the sociology of caste. This paper, in particular, will look into Devanoora Mahadeva's *Kusumabale* to understand how the form and aesthetics of Dalit fiction have radically altered the way caste oppression is challenged in India. The innovative narrative strategies imply newer ways of imagining Dalit communities and registering their protest. *Kusumabale* highlights the relevance of rejecting European realism to understand Dalit realism critically. Various motifs employed by Mahadeva like folklore, the *kathakava* tradition, alternative historiography etc. will be analysed to rethink the cultural memory of the past as well as the contemporary lived experiences of the Dalits. These narrative elements will further examine how the novel as a form has been "hybridized" by the Dalit writers to resist caste-based oppression. This paper also aims to interrogate how the novel ways of articulating anger, agony, resistance and hope in Dalit literature affect the Dalit subjectivity while imagining caste in literary works.

Keywords: Realism, history, oppression, resistance, politics, aesthetics

Dalit¹ literature is a meta-narrative of the plight of the "lower" castes in India. It is marked as literature of protest, re-envisioning history by documenting the violence, oppression and systemic exploitation. Hardly a product of five decades, the corpus of Dalit literature is no longer limited to the Hindi belt² but it has spread itself throughout the