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Book Review

RSS: Depth and Breadth by Devanuru Mahadeva

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“Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment. It has to be cultivated. We must realize that our people have yet to learn it. Democracy in India is only a top dressing on an Indian soil which is essentially undemocratic.” – This observation made by Dr Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly is a timely caveat which needs to be reiterated from time to time. Renowned Kannada writer and intellectual Devanur Mahadeva does this with commendable finesse in his latest book titled “RSS – Aala Mattu Agala (RSS -Its Depth and Breadth)”, an excoriating critique of the ideologies of RSS. It is unique that the author in his dedication of his book, hopes that the children who are born as citizens of this world may remain so as they grow older. Mahadeva has not claimed proprietary rights over this book. He has also adopted an ingenious strategy for distribution of this highly readable monograph of 64 pages on RSS lucidly written in Kannada, devoid of pedantry or stilted flourishes. He has permitted

several publishers to publish this booklet without expecting any royalty. Several translations in regional languages have also resulted in the proliferation of his ideas in the Indian subcontinent, dealing a fatal blow to the Hindu supremacist, hegemonic agendas of the RSS.

Mahadeva emerged as the icon of the Kannada Bandaya movement with his masterpiece “Kusumabale” and the widely popular “Odalala” by resuscitating Kannada literary idiom with his subversive use of the colloquial dialect in a startlingly refreshing manner. He does it again by delivering the coup de grace in RSS – Aala Mattu Agala in his inimitable, iconoclastic style. Mahadeva has makes an impassioned appeal to the people of our civil society to vindicate the democratic and secular edifice of contemporary India and uphold the sanctity of our Constitution by subscribing to the ideologies of solidarity, equality and tolerance enshrined in it. The book is a



new addition to the impressive list of other works by Devanuru Mahadeva over which also he has not claimed any proprietary rights : IgaBharata Matanaduttide (Now India is Speaking), Janandolanagala Maha Maitri Jatha (Grand alliance March of People's movements) Ondu Pranalike (A Manifesto) and Maha Maitrige Nade Nudi (Ways and Means for the Grand Alliance). Originally published by Abhiruchi Prakashana Mysore , the book now has many publishers across the state and nation state.

In his riveting foreword, Mahadeva recounts the horror of the havoc and mayhem caused by RSS by presenting a fascinating metaphor from our folk tales. The tale of the sorcerer who recklessly goes on a rampage as his 'prana' (life –soul) resides in a parakeet hidden in a distant cave , beyond the seven seas . To put the kibosh on the sorcerer's atrocities, one has to find the parakeet where his 'prana' resides. This takes Mahadeva on an inexorable quest for the 'life force' that energises the RSS in the ensuing five chapters : 'RSS na Prana Ellellide?' (Where all lies the life of RSS ?), 'Heegella Dakhalegalu Matanaduttive' (Thus speak the documents) 'Indu Vartamanadalli' (Today in the present), 'Ee Hinney alli Mataantara Nishedha Kayideya Marma' (In this background, the crux of religious conversion prohibition Act) and 'Eega ' (Now). In the chapter "where all lies the life of RSS?" Mahadeva discusses excerpts from the thoughts and viewpoints of Golwalkar and Savarkar Exposing the relentless indoctrinating machinations of the RSS brainwashing children about the Chaturvarna system by introducing Bhagavad Geeta in the curriculum in the states ruled by the BJP, Mahadeva contends that Golwalkar's declaration to 1350 top-level leaders of the RSS at Madras, in 1930, where he declared "RSS inspired by one flag, one leader and one ideology is lighting the flame of Hindutva in each and every corner of this great land." Is a fascist and Nazi ideology. Therefore, Mahadeva states "Hence, for this particular Hindu stock, which hopes for a child born in India as a 'global citizen' to be tightly bound into the Jaati-varnasystem and wishes for it to remain within its confines until death, contemporary India's Constitution drafted under the leadership of Ambedkar with its civil and humanist ideals, is actually a nightmare. This is ruining their sleep. RSS and their parivara (family/affiliates/associates) are involved in indefensible acts to destroy our Constitution."

In the second chapter "Thus speak the documents" Mahadeva elaborates upon the xenophobic convictions of the RSS by alluding to how Golwakar had warned that there were only two courses open to the foreigners in India. "Either they ought to merge themselves in the national race and adopt its culture, or to live at its mercy so long as the national race may allow them to do so and to leave the country at the will of the national race...". Condemning

these 'racist, depraved' attitudes of Golwalkar, Mahadeva poses pertinent counter-discursive questions regarding the Anti Tippu propaganda. He asks if the allegations of RSS that Tippu Sultan had forcibly converted over 69,000 people to Islam in Coorg were true, Coorg should have had an overwhelmingly huge Muslim population today whereas in our contemporary times the Muslim population in Coorg is only 15%.

Mahadeva observes how the seeds of deceit are sown by the RSS and how the crops of this chicanery are being harvested by RSS and its allies. The third chapter analyses how the RSS ideologues denounce the federal states and their semi-autonomous existence in favour of a totalitarian, anti pluralist government. Vehemently opposing the imposition of Hindi in non Hindi speaking states, Mahadeva articulates his suspicions : staring at us now are the efforts to make Hindi the lingua-franca as the first step towards achieving the goal of making Sanskrit eventually into the common language of our country. These are all small steps towards eventually realising their anti-pluralist aspiration of one nation, one language, one race, one leader, etc" He also points out how the RSS has hijacked and sabotaged the education system by resorting to unsavory revision of textbooks. He also throws light on the misogynist agendas of RSS and how by weakening the public education and strengthening private education , RSS has been instrumental in depriving women from underprivileged groups of access to education. In the next chapter on religious conversion prohibition act, Mahadeva explains how BJP presented 'Religious freedom Protection Bill 2021' in the legislative assembly, got it passed in a rush, got the approval of the cabinet to implement it through an ordinance, and secured the governor's assent to it and now it has become a law. According to Mahadeva, "This Act is called 'Protection of Right to Religious Freedom". But on closer examination, we find that it is replete with prohibitions against religious conversion. There is not even a whiff of religion, freedoms, rights or any protection in this act. Although named after freedom, the act only offers ways to demolish freedoms. That's why people have begun referring to it popularly as the 'Prohibition of Conversion Act' in line with its actual intent ! Furthermore, Mahadeva sharply points out how women and Dalits are deprived of any agency under this act to make their decisions and there is an infantilisation of women and Dalits under this act.

Against the conflagrations of communalism and religious fundamentalism in the recent years, Mahadeva's voice of sanity appealing for equality, espousing communal harmony and rights of the disenfranchised sections of the civil society, his unequivocal indictment of the religious nationalisms that threaten the substratum of democracy has an irresistible appeal.

