Premium

Views about Mayawati, and what they tell us

If the new awakened culture is really committed to representation to marginalised identities, they will not find an alternative better than Mayawati.

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Like Mayawati, Mamata Banerjee is a woman leader of a national political party. But she has the privilege of being a Brahmin, and gets an easy pass.

I am yet to meet a savarna feminist who admires Mayawati. I will cite merely two incidents that have reassured my faith that caste trumps gender and other progressive politics.

A few years ago, at an event at Yale University, I was invited to be on a panel discussing parliamentary elections and parties. The conversation was plotted in the colonial-Brahminical discourse of Hindu-Muslim dichotomy. The panel included savarnas and a tribal woman activist. After the event, the woman panelists insisted on having a feminist viewpoint on the Indian elections. They criticised the Modi government for its failure to give fair representation to women.

Some of the people present were the kind who are morning liberals, afternoon progressives, night-time radicals —and full-time casteist chauvinists. Then the topic moved to Dalits. They decried the state of Dalit politics in unison.
I held forth on my views on the political culture around Dalits and the faith in one of its juggernauts, Mayawati.

As soon as they heard the "M" word, they burst forth in famished dissonance. The tribal activist from the Northeast said: "Mayawati is such a bad influence. She is corrupt and inefficient." The women feminists and liberal male-feminists agreed.

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I asked what the proof was for such accusations. No one had a response. The activist conceded she didn't know much about mainland Indian politics, but had definitive views on Mayawati.

I asked them if they considered Mayawati a woman at all? Did they think their feminist solidarity could be extended to a woman politician who is single, and paving her way in a Brahminical-patriarchal society? Could they think of anyone like Mayawati in India who had defied all known norms and defined new frontiers of politics and social revolution? Is there a figure who could compete with the status and story of Mayawati?

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The activist responded that Mayawati was unsuitable for Indian politics, that she had dictatorial proclivities. A Pakistani political scientist who was present pushed back, asking the activist to imagine the meaning of feminism, and why did they not apply the same rules to the politicians they admired.

Another incident. I was invited to deliver a keynote lecture at a conference in Washington D.C. One of those attending was a Tamil Brahmin professor, a self-confessed “brown feminist” fighting against white supremacy. Her views of Mayawati were so crude they would not pass the editorial policy of this newspaper. Sufficient to note that she, an Indian American, didn’t have any relatable knowledge of Mayawati.

The same level of discomfort is seen in the case of Lalu Prasad and Hemant Soren, an OBC and Scheduled Tribe respectively.

Such liberals and caste-privileged academics and activists in the West exhibit the ancestral bigotry running in their blood.

Like Mayawati, Mamata Banerjee is a woman leader of a national political party. But she has the privilege of being a Brahmin, and gets an easy pass.

The savarnas are united in their defiance of Mayawati even though she has appointed Brahmins as leaders of the party in both the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha.

If the new awakened culture is really committed to representation to marginalised identities, they will not find an alternative better than Mayawati. She checks all the boxes of progressivism and redemption. She is a woman, a single woman, Dalit, comes from a backward region and is revered by the most marginalised and rejected masses of the country.

A four-time chief minister of one of the largest states, who implemented inclusivity and development as her administration’s raison d’ être, but who saw media and experts ignore the same.

If only people start examining themselves through the critical caste approach, they might be honest enough to realise the worth of the BSP. If whites in America can support a black person, is it a waste of energy to think of privileged castes rallying behind Mayawati across India?

If Mayawati is not an option for the feminists, progressives, and the woke culture, then they are a house of charlatans devoted to eliminating the Dalit self-respect movement, and no attention should be paid to their abuses peddled as opinions.

The writer is the author of Caste Matters and curates the ‘Dalitality’ column

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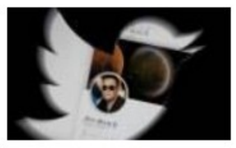
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