

India should be grateful for a leader like Mayawati

She cannot be equated with any north Indian leader, except Narendra Modi. Yet, she is more experienced than him.

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BSP Chief Mayawati (File Photo)

Not many have understood Mayawati or the BSP, creating difficulties in deciphering the telltale signs of Indian politics. India should be grateful to have a charismatic leader like her, despite the casteist regime in media, politics, business and other sectors. BSP has created an ideal, democratic experience in a land that enquires about caste before establishing a relationship.

She is not to be taken for someone soft-spoken. She cannot be easily guarded, but is ideologically pure. In her memoir, which is a complete unison of the party and self, she narrates her life story through the life of Jyotirao Phule and B R Ambedkar. Mayawati has been in active politics since the age of 21. Many cadres who work with her refuse to give up on her. They say they have seen the struggles she endured due

to the limited opportunities available to her as a “woman in a patriarchal, Manuwadi society” — a fact she reiterates in her memoir, *Mere Sangharshmay Jeevan Evam BSP Movement Ka Safarnama*.

Along with her mentor Kanshi Ram and other cadres, Mayawati has surveyed the country. Many reminisce about how they took her on their bicycle to the remote parts of the country, where they would often wind up sleeping on the floor at a cadre’s house. She gave up on her job and the benefits it accrued for the mission.

This is the story of the rise of the Bahujan movement and Mayawati, and how she carved a path for herself despite being a single woman out in the world. She defied the sexist, casteist and pathetic gaze of the world. She is where she is today because of her scarred feet, hardened back and blemished face. What does a woman need to endure to win people over? Mayawati has done it all. It is about time the country recognised her as a leader who can lead everyone, as she has demonstrated in her long public career of 47 years. The work in development, progress, education, land rights, and especially drawing women out of superstition and empowering them as half of India’s population, is noteworthy.

Mayawati cannot be equated with any north Indian leaders, save for [Narendra Modi](#). Yet, she is more experienced than him. She has been an elected representative since 1989. Before taking the reins of [Uttar Pradesh](#) four times as CM, she was out on the field from early 1977 and became a full-time BSP worker in 1984, after her years as a member of BAMCEF and DS-4.

Besides the appeal of a mass leader, the ideology works in Mayawati’s favour. In India, three mainstream political parties are firmly rooted in ideologies — [BJP](#), BSP and the Communists. They have a set goal that uses politics as a tool, while other parties make politics their ideology and fail at every turn.

Alliances and numbers

Kanshi Ram used to tell his cadres that if Congress becomes weak, BSP will strengthen, whereas the rise of the BJP will eventually pave the way for the absolute rise of BSP. As a scientist, he observed the nature of the chemical osmosis of various properties of society. Looking at the response to BJP’s current mandate, only BSP

can take it head-on ideologically today. Though it may not end up sending representatives to the House, the vote share count makes it a strong player. One of the difficulties of party politics is the possibility of alliances. By not aligning with either of the alliances, Mayawati has established the kernel of democracy that needs to move beyond the two-party system — a system that often privileges the dominant classes. Both Congress and BJP have demonstrated their bad intentions towards SCs, STs and Mayawati. By standing apart from these hegemonic forces, the patron mother of Bahujan politics of India has privileged the community's interest rather than running the errands of electioneering.

Pre-poll alliances mean getting subsumed in anti-Dalit political dispensation, where the core voter gets neutralised and the party's vote share gets compromised. BSP is unlike any other alliance partner. It is a national party that can field candidates in all states. It also does not flinch while breaking alliances after finding that the government is not working in favour of SCs, STs and OBCs.

Mayawati's drawback is her inaccessibility to the public and her uncharismatic deputies. With her party cadres often being accused of untrustworthiness, some have claimed that had to pay for an audience with her. There is hardly any pioneering leader worth the name who has continued in the party in her leadership. Most were fired. In his foreword to the book *The Iron Lady Mayawati*, by Jamil Akhter, Kanshi Ram has explained the reason for Mayawati's strong character: having faced opposition and jealousy from senior party colleagues, she sidelined them when she got a chance and made way for her reign.

Her possibly biggest stumbling block are her advisors or lackeys. The aims of this mediocre, irrelevant posse is extremely limited since it does not have a Kanshi Ram in them, which is to think about India and the world as a petri dish of Bahujan politics. That is why, currently, one cannot see party-sponsored social movements or vice versa. There isn't a media house catering to the party's propaganda nor non-political associations across the board advancing the message of the "incomplete mission of Dr Ambedkar", a slogan BSP carries till now. BSP under Mayawati is no longer a technocratic party that is failing to attract non-cadres.

The colour of the party has changed, from being a missionary movement to charges of nepotism. Perhaps this is the party's adaptability to the challenges of the 21st century. Mayawati remains a thick wall for Indian democracy.

Suraj Yengde, author of 'Caste Matters', curates Dalitality, has returned to Harvard University

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