

Atrocities Against UP Dalits in the Wake of Mayawati's Victory: Disturbing Trends

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While Mayawati is being hailed for her party's unique metamorphosis from Bahujan to 'Sarvajan', Mayawati's victory has no doubt sharpened the aspirations of dalits in UP for democracy and empowerment. However, the few weeks that have followed Mayawati's ascension to power have witnessed a disturbing trend: a spate of assaults and atrocities against dalits.

Take the example of Mohanlalganj, barely an hour's journey away from the seat of power in Lucknow. Here, a poor and aged dalit peasant was shot dead, and his son as well as daughter-in-law seriously injured. Their only fault was that they resisted the forcible grabbing of their land in the name of road by a rich Brahmin who also happened to be a government officer. Despite being pre-warned about the possibility of such an assault, police and administration turned a blind eye.

In Raebareilly, again in the vicinity of the state capital, an old dalit agrarian labour was brutally beaten to death. He had refused to work for a Rajput landlord, since the landlord had not paid his long-due wages and instead got him arrested on a false pretext of theft during the Mulayam regime. Possibly emboldened by the formation of Mayawati Government he asserted his minimum democratic right to accept or refuse an employer, and paid for it with his life. Significantly, the killers - upper caste feudal men, are also 'associated' with the BSP. So when the local Rajput BSP leader came to the spot apparently to assert the rights of dalits, he was actually maneuvering to save the main culprits, his caste-class kinsmen!

The Bundelkhand region, hit by famine and drought, is a site of tremendous agrarian distress. In Mahoba, a village in Bundelkhand, a dalit village Pradhan was recently tied up and brutally beaten by a moneylender landlord of Brahmin origin. This humiliation and violence was inflicted on him as punishment when he failed to repay the usurious interest on the loan lent by the landlord. Recall that such moneylenders are responsible in a large part for turning Bundelkhand into another Vidarbha, with soaring suicide rates of poor peasants.

In western UP too, a dalit boy was killed - ironically when he joined others of his community who were celebrating the victory of Mayawati. Here too the 'Sarvajan' killers are yet to face any punishment.

The emerging pattern of these incidents indicates that despite the 'historic' victory of Mayawati ji's Sarvajan politics and the miraculous 'social engineering', the assaults on dalits continue unabated. In fact perhaps the assault has intensified because there is assertion on the part of dalits in the wake of their heightened expectations, while the oppressors, too, do see a new hope in the Sarvajan Sarkar and assert their feudal 'right' to oppress!

Liberating the state from the clutches of mafia-criminals was the USP of Mayawati in the recently held elections. Needless to say, this goal requires an uncompromising battle against criminalization of politics, not just some selective gimmicks based on political convenience. The use of criminals to grab power is the basic source of break-down of law and order in the society. And obviously the vulnerable sections of the society, the poor and the dalits, are its worst victims.

Dalit emancipation and establishing a casteless society are the proclaimed strategic goals of Mayawati . The continuing atrocities on dalits even in the wake of victory is a warning that these goals are impossible without thoroughgoing democratization of the state and society. Doing away with all forms of feudal oppression, strict implementation of SC/ST Act without dilution, resolving land disputes through proper land reforms by constituting a Land Commission, ensuring proper and timely wages and holding the state machinery responsible for any lapse regarding atrocities on the poor are some of the minimum steps required.

Will the Mayawati govt., in its new avatar as government of the Sarvajan, dare to address these urgent issues of democratic reform that are the only possible bases of dalit dignity?

P.S.

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