

**By Sidharth Mishra**



As the events have unfolded, the 'resignation' of Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati from Parliament last week, hours after storming out of the Rajya Sabha over not being allowed time to complete her speech on alleged Dalit atrocities in Uttar Pradesh, has proved to be a drama albeit with an anti-climax. Anti-climax because the BSP leader was forced to 'resubmit' her resignation as people strongly came to believe that Mayawati chose to 'resign' to survive the political crisis she was facing. With media starting a discussion on her resignation may just be red-herring as she had not submitted the quit papers in proper format, the BSP leader, to overcome any embarrassment, decided to resubmit her papers and force its acceptance.

This anti-climax has made the battle for survival, which the BSP Chief was fighting, grimmer than any time before in her nearly four-decade long political career. The performance of her party in the 2017 UP Assembly elections and 2014 Lok Sabha elections have rung warning bells for the former UP Chief Minister. Her re-entry into the legislative domain is very difficult as her party doesn't have the wherewithal to get her a fresh term on its own. In Uttar Pradesh, the state she ruled four times as Chief Minister, her party has just 19 MLAs. She can't even enter the Legislative Council in Lucknow with that strength, forget about Rajya Sabha. That leaves her with the option to take former Bihar CM Lalu Yadav's offer to enter Rajya Sabha from Bihar or contest the vacancies in Lok Sabha which are going to come up in Uttar Pradesh in near future. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will have to resign his Gorakhpur seat and Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Chandra Maurya Phulpur seat, when they get elected to the state legislature. They have to become part of the state legislature before September ends. Taking on the protégés of the two BJP stalwarts in their pocket-boroughs would not be easy, and a defeat here could further demolish Mayawati's already much-eroded stature. The present crisis in her career calls for a quick flashback on her rise to power. In 1993, BSP founder Kanshi Ram formed a coalition with Samajwadi Party ahead of the Assembly polls and a government was formed. However, the coalition broke midway and Mayawati became the youngest Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in 1995. She was also the first woman Scheduled Caste Chief Minister in India. In 1997 and again in 2002 she became Chief Minister with the outside support of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the second time only for a year up to August 26, 2003, following the BJP withdrawing support. She, however, used the opportunity of wilderness from power to rebuild her party and came back strongly with BSP winning an absolute majority in the 2007 Assembly polls. In 2007, the BSP came to power winning 206 of 403 seats. It had entered the polls with a metamorphosis in its social structure with Brahmins being projected as major partners with the dominant Dalits in the social alliance. The BSP government adopted 'Sarvajan Sukhaye, Sarvajan Hitaye' as its motto, to indicate its desire to promote all communities. The words meant that its government was one for everyone's welfare and everyone's interests. This was a new BSP, which sought to shed its image as a party of the Dalits. This image alteration

## Battling to regain lost turf

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helped to rout major rivals and also walking away with the traditional votes of Congress and BJP. However, she did not show the patience to capitalise on the mandate given in the state and developed a desire to become a national player. The upper caste 'Sarvajan' voters did not see any reason why she should be Prime Minister. Therefore, when her party managed to win just 19 Lok Sabha seats in 2009, she showed signs nervousness and returned to her roots of Dalit politics, losing on the inroads she had made in other communities. More importantly, many Dalits did not turn up to vote, something not reflected in exit poll data. The exit poll data for 2009 did show, however, a shift of some non-Jatav voters to other parties, mainly the Congress. While Mayawati initially blamed Muslim voters for the 2009 debacle, the low turnout of Dalit voters unnerved her. After May 2009, as a result, Mayawati changed the 'tone' of her government. In name, it remained a Sarvajan government, but in practice, Dalits started getting what they wanted. To give this signal, she sidelined Satish Chandra Mishra, her Brahmin mascot. It wasn't symbolism alone. She did what the Dalit masses wanted: Gave their educated lot jobs, especially as assistant teachers, made the SC/ST Atrocities Act's implementation more stringent, gave small pieces of land to thousands of landless Dalits, and built them houses. However, all this did not help. Her popularity continued to recede. In 2012, she lost in the Legislative Assembly elections to the rival Samajwadi Party. The party even after this debacle failed to arrest its downfall, facing a major rout in 2014 Lok Sabha polls and 2017 state Assembly polls. After 2007, Mayawati went into a megalomaniac avatar shunning public interaction and getting herself 'sculpted in stone' to decorate ornamental marks. This huge stress on politics of identity failed to retain her voters, especially non-Jatav Dalits, who have drifted first towards Congress and now to the BJP. Election of Ram Nath Kovind as President should keep alive this Dalit drift towards the BJP for sometimes to come. Under the situation, Mayawati, in the absence of her mentor, is showing signs of nervousness. Her moves are not more than knee-jerk reactions. One would have to wait to see if they fructify into any long term gains for her.

(Sidharth Mishra is Editor, [CapitalKhabar](#) )