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MONUMENTAL PRIDE

Mayawati's Memorials in Lucknow

Abstract

Over the past decade, dozens of large-scale architectural memorials commemorating social reformers associated with India's historically oppressed "untouchable" (*dalit*) caste have been built throughout Uttar Pradesh. The memorials were commissioned by the state's former chief minister, Mayawati, herself a *dalit*. This essay analyzes intersections of politics, caste, gender, and visibility at two of her memorials in Lucknow—the Ambedkar Memorial and the Prerna Kendra (a crematory memorial). Specifically, the author argues that the forms and decoration of the memorials highlight the absence of earlier *dalit* leaders and present Mayawati as their legitimate political heir.

Especially in commemorative architecture (monuments, memorials, historic markers, museums), we learn whose histories are legitimate, which narratives are superfluous (or symbolically omitted), or which images are embraced as part of our official, national accounts of origins and destiny. We learn who is allowed to speak for history, who is allowed to speak for "us," and whose voices will always be considered marginal to the main event.

—Margaret E. Farrar¹

THE PAST FEW YEARS have witnessed radical additions to the built environment of Uttar Pradesh (U.P.), India's largest and most populous state. Dozens of large-scale architectural memorials—enshrining narrative bronze friezes and monumental bronze and marble statues of social reformers associated with the historically oppressed *dalit* (formerly "untouchable") caste—have been built in the state capital of Lucknow and in Noida, outside Delhi. These cities are now also punctuated by statues that stand sentinel at crowded intersections, outside government office buildings, and by the side of interstate highways, with smaller cement statues throughout the state's rural areas. The memorial buildings and statues were commissioned by Mayawati (born 1956), herself a *dalit*, during her four terms as the U.P. chief minister between 1995 and 2012.² Mayawati's memorials are the most conspicuous expression of establishing *dalit* visibility in her state. Others include renaming districts and prominent buildings to honor *dalit* heroes. The sheer number of the memorials, coupled with their monumental scale, arguably make Mayawati the single most prolific architectural patron in India since the British Raj commissioned New Delhi in 1911.

The cast of characters in Mayawati's sculptural programs includes notable *dalits* and those who championed the rights of India's subalterns. Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar (1891–1956), the *dalit* founder of the modern anti-caste movement and writer of

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Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar. Bronze sculpture in front of the Ambedkar stupa, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar Samajik Parivartan Prateek Sthal (Ambedkar Memorial), Lucknow

the Indian constitution, is the best-known public figure in the statue cycles. Others include Jyotirao Phule (1827–1890), a campaigner for the education of women and low castes, and the Buddha, who preached against casteism and whose teachings many *dalits* have consequently adopted. Statues of Mayawati and Kanshi Ram (1934–2006), her mentor and predecessor in the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), are given pride of place in the memorials and often are duplicated several times at each site. With the monuments’ scale, their recognizable architectural forms and decoration, and the ubiquity of the *dalit* statues, Mayawati’s commissions have made an indelible mark on Uttar Pradesh’s urban fabric.

The memorials aim to empower *dalits* through twin strategies, which Manuela Ciotti refers to as “presence in space,” and “presence in time,” both of which have been denied to the *dalit* community for centuries.³ While the former offers visibility, the latter presents an illustrious *dalit* history, in which its members may take pride and aspire to a better future. When criticized for such flagrant expenditures, Mayawati consistently asserts that the memorials fulfill a vital social role and give hope and pride to her community.⁴ As one *dalit* member of Mayawati’s cabinet remarked, “The statues have given Dalits a place in the history of this country, nobody can change that.”⁵

Drawing from Foucault’s work on the relationship between space and power, Margaret E. Farrar remarks that those in power construct and reiterate social, political, and economic power structures in the built environment. The situation is circular: power shapes space and vice versa. Space legitimizes and ennobles some groups and excludes, denigrates, and silences others. Commemorative architecture is supremely exclusive and visually amplifies messages of communal belonging or segregation.⁶ For centuries in India, *dalits* have been denied a presence in space and time, both literally and symbolically. This spatial and historical exclusion then perpetuates *dalit* social marginalization, inside and outside the community. It is therefore not surprising that the territorial claiming of physical space and marking it with *dalit* historical figures—thereby visually demanding that they are recognized—is an integral component of Mayawati’s radical brand of *dalit* assertion.

The sprawling Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar Samajik Parivartan Prateek Sthal (hereafter referred to by its popular name, the Ambedkar Memorial) with its monumental Ambedkar stupa (figs. 1, 2) and the Bahujan Samaj Prerna Kendra

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Ambedkar Memorial, Lucknow

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Bahujan Samaj Prerna Kendra
(Prerna Kendra), Lucknow

(hereafter, Prerna Kendra; fig. 3), both in Lucknow, are Mayawati's most politically meaningful architectural commissions. The Prerna Kendra is unique in that it is a funerary memorial that enshrines Kanshi Ram's cremated ashes. In commissioning her predecessor's memorial, Mayawati was participating in a well-established Indic performance of legitimating political authority. As with her other architectural commissions, the Ambedkar Memorial and Prerna Kendra's formal and decorative programs, statues, and frieze cycles, as well as the commemorative rituals held at the sites, work in concert to unite *dalits* in a singular "imagined community" and establish Mayawati as their rightful charismatic leader. Images and text present Mayawati as the political heir to the most celebrated figures in *dalit* history, designating Ambedkar, Kanshi Ram, and Mayawati as charismatic leaders by referring to models of Indic kingship and linking Mayawati to more recent examples of gendered authority. I employ the term "charismatic leader" in accordance with Max Weber's definition:

... a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them, the individual is treated as a leader.... What is alone important is how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to the charismatic authority, by his "followers" or "disciples."⁷

Significantly, Weber suggests that what matters most is that followers *believe* a leader possesses exceptional characteristics—not that he or she actually possesses them. Like many leaders who seek to convince their followers of their extraordinariness, Mayawati announces her unique and exceptional powers through monumental public art with straightforward messages and meaningful, archaized styles.

Also pertinent for understanding the artworks in the Ambedkar Memorial and the Prerna Kendra are Weber's notions about how charisma may be transmitted ("the routinization of charisma") from one leader to another. These include designation by the previous charismatic leader and being descended from him.⁸ Mayawati

explicitly references the former and implicitly suggests the latter in the statues and friezes in her buildings. Weber also cites support—followers’ lavish donations and gifts—as a marker of an individual’s charismatic authority,⁹ which has parallels in institutions of traditional Indic kingship. Mayawati has been the recipient of extravagant gifts from her constituents, a fact that is highlighted in her commissions.¹⁰

It is not surprising that Mayawati has invested so heavily in a politically charged visual culture and performances of her own charisma. When she first ran for office, she was an unlikely candidate as chief minister. While she was not the first *dalit* chief minister in India, she was the first woman from her community to hold the office as well as the youngest in the state. Coupled with her extravagant public displays of wealth and acceptance of gifts from her community, Mayawati’s prolific memorial building activity has consistently garnered her both national criticism and praise. The *dalit* community itself is divided in its support of her building programs. Many *dalits* to whom I spoke at her sites unanimously and enthusiastically supported her and echoed her rhetoric of the necessity of her community building program. Both factions have received ample media exposure.¹¹

The *dalit* movement and Mayawati’s political career have been the subject of several recent studies.¹² Nicholas Jaoul¹³ and Gary Michael Tartakov¹⁴ examine emerging trends in *dalit* visual culture, particularly the increasing prevalence of Ambedkar statues in rural Uttar Pradesh. They did not consider Mayawati’s monumental urban statues, presumably because this now statewide phenomenon was only in its nascent stages during the time of their fieldwork. Focusing her analyses on its architectural form and location, Maxine Loynd cogently argues that the Prerna Kendra was created as an intimate, exclusive *dalit* communal space, quite different from the Ambedkar Memorial.¹⁵ However, Loynd’s study does not consider the building’s mortuary roles and is silent on the subject of its decorative program, whose thematic content highlights Mayawati’s political lineage and charisma. Thus, a critical study of these two buildings, their statues, and friezes within her wider political agenda has yet to be undertaken. Before turning to the memorials themselves, it is pertinent to first briefly consider *dalit* history and key figures esteemed by the community with whom Mayawati visually associates through her commissions.

(Re)Claiming Dalit History and Asserting Communal Presence

Dalit—derived from the Sanskrit and Marathi word meaning “ground down, crushed, destroyed”—is an inclusive term that members of India’s various lowest castes have used to refer to themselves since the early twentieth century. Rebuking the Gandhian term *harijān* (people of God) as patronizing, Ambedkar defiantly adopted and popularized *dalit*. Historically *dalits*’ hereditary occupations, which

in Hinduism are associated with caste, have been characterized by literal and ritual pollution. For generations, members of various *dalit* groups were in contact with corpses (removing dead humans and animals, working with leather, and butchering); served as sweepers; and performed other menial jobs.¹⁶ This pollution is popularly regarded as contagious, leading to forced *dalit* segregation in their areas of habitation (predominantly in slums), at religious sites, and at water sources. *Dalits* had no recourse or means to better themselves; until the mid-twentieth century, education was largely denied to them. Numerous social schemes have been implemented since Indian independence in 1947 to rectify this, such as reservations for *dalits* in schools, universities, government jobs, and political offices. Perhaps the greatest single public triumph for the community was the 1997 democratic election of *dalit* K. R. Narayanan as president of India. However, while such concessions and appointments have markedly improved the *dalits*' opportunities for upward social and financial mobility, they remain among the poorest and most socially marginalized people in the nation.

Sources differ on the roots of this discrimination and precisely how long it has been in effect. Brahmanical texts dating to the first millennium BCE outline the various Hindu castes and note the existence of those outside of the order, who are thus "untouchable." However, since Ambedkar's campaigns dating from the 1930s to 1950s, communal pride and assertiveness has grown steadily. A key factor has been the creation of *dalit* "presence in time" and the construction of an alternative *dalit* history, which presents the community as the former possessors of wealth, positions of power, and education—the very qualities popular history denies them. According to these new trajectories, in the ancient past, *kṣhatryās* (rulers and warriors of the Hindu caste system) and Brahmins (members of the priestly caste) divested *dalits* of their lofty positions by treachery and relegated them to the lowest social positions. Whether or not these ancient histories are true is not the point. Explanation, pride, and hope are. These alternative histories offer the community a reason for their present subaltern status, a group of role models, and by extension, a hope that they may achieve equality, if not regain their former status.¹⁷

The BSP has made concerted efforts to increase *dalit* awareness of key historical community members of whom they can be proud. Figures from the ancient past include sages such as Valmiki, the author of the *Ramayana*. More recent notable figures include female *dalit* martial heroes (*viranganī*) martyred during the 1857 rebellion against the British. The most celebrated contemporary *dalit* heroes are Ambedkar, Kanshi Ram, and Mayawati. In fact, Mayawati worked closely with Kanshi Ram to fashion her charismatic public image and promote her qualifications to lead the community by visually associating her with both Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram.¹⁸

Mayawati's memorial commissions are key strategies in the visual articulation of her political lineage from these two male *dalit* leaders and her claims to charismatic authority. Her buildings and statues are metaphorical lighthouses and visual rallying points, from which the BSP is able to mobilize the community to vote for their candidates, who then will demand more rights and better opportunities on the *dalits'* behalf. These messages are amplified through a scale that is larger than life; through construction from costly, durable materials that are historically associated with royalty and political authority; and finally, through historically meaningful styles.

The tradition of public memorialization through sculptures and public buildings in India began with the British, who installed bronze and marble images of the imperial family and high-ranking Raj civil servants and commissioned buildings such as museums and railway stations in their honor. After independence, colonial statues were largely removed and replaced by ones depicting nationalist heroes, particularly freedom fighters such as Gandhi, the Raṇī of Jhansi, and Bhagat Singh. Public buildings were also renamed, but in honor of figures who were almost exclusively from the higher castes, thereby effectively excluding *dalits* from Indian post-colonial history and public memorial space. In the early 1960s, Ambedkar joined his upper-caste nationalist cohorts when two public bronze statues of him were erected, one in Mumbai, the other in front of the National Parliament in New Delhi.

These two statues established an Ambedkar iconography: dressed in a suit, tie, and glasses, and holding one hand up with the index finger punctuating the air.¹⁹ The Mumbai statue added the Indian constitution, tucked under Ambedkar's lowered arm, inscribed with "Bharat" (India) to ensure its meaning. Both Mayawati's statues (see fig. 1) and the smaller-scale cement statues *dalits* install in their villages and slums are based on these models.²⁰

Since Mayawati first came to office in the mid-1990s, public *dalit* statues, particularly those of Ambedkar, have increased exponentially. Today in Lucknow, Ambedkar has a more conspicuous public presence than Gandhi does. At the main intersection of Hajarat Ganj, a fashionable historic shopping district, an older statue of Gandhi has been joined by a larger and newer Ambedkar companion across the street. Such visual one-upping was surely not unintentional. In fact, this is a trope in Mayawati's commissions, expressed through scale and text. Gandhi and Ambedkar clashed on several occasions over the issue of caste; while opposing inequality, Gandhi maintained that there were social and cultural benefits to the system. Ambedkar campaigned for its abolition. While Gandhi is popularly honored as the father of the nation, *dalit* activists such as Ambedkar, Kanshi Ram, and particularly Mayawati have publically denounced him on the basis that he did nothing to improve their situation. In memorializing notable figures from her

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Mayawati and Kanshi Ram flank a frieze that depicts them inaugurating the Ambedkar statue. Bronze sculptures, Ambedkar *stupa*, Ambedkar Memorial

own community through buildings and statues, and renaming districts after them, Mayawati was subscribing to and amplifying performances of autonomy established by the independent nation.

Iconographies of Androgyny

... it is remarkable that woman is never imagined as an active, sexual being within this discourse on nationalism.²¹

Mayawati's commissions established iconographies for Kanshi Ram's and her own images as well (fig. 4). Kanshi Ram is dressed in a casual suit, and Mayawati has cropped hair; a plain, loose-fitting *shalwaar kameez*; chunky sandals; a prominent wristwatch; and a handbag at her side. Her simple, unadorned appearance depicts her as unfussy and androgynous. The message conveyed is that she is fully capable of negotiating the male-dominated political arena. Her distinctly unfeminine appearance also highlights her unmarried status, and by extension, her complete dedication to the betterment of her community, which she confirms when questioned about her marital status.

Neither Mayawati's public identity nor her self-promotion of it through monumental images is unique within the visual culture of Indian politics, and there were well-established models available to her all over India. Among these, as Sikata Banerjee documents, are women in the Hindutva movement who, like Mayawati, present themselves as celibate, masculine, and martial to participate in the masculine world of Hindu nationalism.²² The most common trope of female politician in India is the asexual widow, such as Vijayraje Scindia. Like Mayawati, Hindu nationalist women and Hindu widows who have entered politics wear plain clothing and minimal jewelry and makeup.²³ Perhaps Mayawati's androgynous dress and physique as well as her statues bear the closest resemblance to those of Jayalalitha Jayaram, the former actress and chief minister of Tamil Nadu, who entered politics and began promoting herself through public art a few years before Mayawati. In many regards, the two politicians have similar careers. Both have backgrounds that do not recommend them for Indian politics (Mayawati as a *dalit* and Jayalalitha as a former film heroine, a profession widely regarded as immoral for women in India). Both claim to have remained unmarried so that they can dedicate themselves to their political parties. As will be discussed further, two prominent tropes in Jayalalitha's and Mayawati's artistic commissions are their descent from their male

political mentors and their conspicuous political promotion, which announce their charismatic authority.

Tamil Nadu has a well-established history of male actors who enter into political careers. As Preminda Jacob states in her work on the art of cinema and political advertisements in the state, one of the typical means by which actors-turned-politicians promote themselves is through monumental banners and cutouts (outlines of figures) that are stylistically based on film advertisements.²⁴ Since the 1980s, Jayalalitha has commissioned more banners and cutouts, which are larger and display more overt political symbolism, than any other politician in the state. Her public image and political advertisements certainly have served her well; Jayalalitha has achieved incredible success, attaining landslide victories in state elections on three occasions. She and her advertisements are well publicized in the Indian media, and Mayawati surely is familiar with them.

Another significant factor to the deconstruction of Mayawati's public image is that in the 1990s Jayalalitha's promotional images shifted dramatically in their depictions, changing from her wholesome and feminine film roles to a distinctly androgynous appearance. She now appears in the banners and cutouts with her hair in a tight bun and her fleshy physique concealed in a conservatively draped sari and cape. To shift public focus from her film career, in which her success hinged on her sexuality, to her charismatic authority, Jayalalitha desexed herself.²⁵ In so doing, she likely provided a model for Mayawati. However, as is typical of Mayawati's commissions, they surpass their models. The Tamil banners and cutouts are two-dimensional and ephemeral. They are constructed of plywood, supported by bamboo scaffolding, and displayed only for a few weeks. In contrast, Mayawati commissions buildings and statues of durable, luxury materials to convey her wealth and ensure both their permanence and their patron's public memory.

While Jayalalitha's androgyny may be attributed to her desire to distance herself from her film-star past in an effort to be taken seriously as a politician, Mayawati had different, yet equally compelling reasons to publically desex herself. In her analysis of gender among scheduled castes,²⁶ Eva-Maria Hardtman draws attention to the fact that the few low-caste Indian women who rise to positions of political power are subject to intense moral scrutiny by the media, male members of their own political parties, and the entertainment industry.²⁷ There is far less speculation about the morality of Indian high- and middle-caste female politicians (unless they are former film stars) or male politicians, whatever their caste. Untouchables have popularly been considered impure and their touch defiling. *Dalit* women have the added stigma of being widely considered immoral and promiscuous.²⁸

Hardtman cites the late *dalit* outlaw-turned-politician Phoolan Devi and Mayawati as examples. Among the multiple atrocities committed against the for-

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Kanshi Ram announcing Mayawati as his successor. Bronze frieze, sculpture gallery, Ambedkar Memorial

mer was being gang-raped on several occasions and paraded naked, which were then exposed in a book and internationally best-selling film, *Bandit Queen*, without her permission. Phoolan Devi denounced the film in particular, likening it to being raped again.²⁹ In 1996 a male politician publically accused Mayawati of engaging in a long-term affair with Kanshi Ram that resulted in a secret love child. The accusation received widespread coverage in the Indian media for several months.³⁰ It cannot be coincidental that photographs of Mayawati taken until 1997 show her with shoulder-length hair pulled back into a ponytail, wearing a pastel-pink *shalwaar kameez* or occasionally a sari, and gold jewelry. About a year after the accusation, Mayawati cropped her hair and has since appeared exclusively in a shapeless, cream-colored *shalwaar kameez*, which is how she is immortalized in her statues. Phoolan Devi and Mayawati are both also well known for their public cursing and for addressing upper-caste males in the derogatory third-person, *tu*—behaviors associated with low-caste males in India. It would appear that for these two *dalit* female politicians, androgyny and the adoption of stereotypically low-caste masculine behaviors were protective responses to having their private lives and morality the subject of public consumption.

Mayawati as Kanshi Ram's Charismatic Political Heir

Mayawati was born into the *chamar jati*, one of the lowest *dalit* subcastes, whose members have historically been tanners. Positive accounts of Mayawati's biography emphasize her dedication to her studies at a young age and her academic success; her higher degrees include a law degree (LLB). In 1977, she was studying for her civil service examinations when she met Kanshi Ram, who was establishing the BSP at the time. Kanshi Ram groomed Mayawati as a party leader, and in 2001, at a large rally in Lucknow, he named her as his successor as president of the BSP (fig. 5).³¹ When he suffered a paralyzing stroke in 2004, he convalesced at Mayawati's home in Delhi while she personally cared for and fed him. When he died in 2006, as per the tenets of his will, he was cremated in a Buddhist ritual, and Mayawati personally lit his funeral pyre.³²

In both Hinduism and Buddhism, performance of the last rites is the final responsibility of a father's eldest son and heir. By taking on this central and traditionally male role in Kanshi Ram's funeral, Mayawati challenged gender discrimination and decisively established herself as the heir of Kanshi Ram. Her action also suggested a more intimate, familial descent from the founder of the party and, by

extension, her inheritance of his charismatic authority through two well-established paths: designation by the previous leader or descent from him. Kanshi Ram's cremated ashes were placed in an urn, which was processed in a cortege through Lucknow and which Mayawati personally installed under bronze statues of the two of them in the Prerna Kendra.³³ These two acts—Kanshi Ram's announcement that Mayawati was his successor and her performance of his last rites—irrefutably established her as his heir apparent. The two occasions are also among the most popular subjects in the bronze friezes in Mayawati's memorials.

That Kanshi Ram specified that he receive his last rites according to Buddhist tradition is also significant. Although neither he nor Mayawati formally converted to the faith, Buddhism has been politically and religiously associated with the *dalit* movement since Ambedkar's highly public conversion in 1956. Adding another layer to *dalit* alternative history, Ambedkar asserted that members of India's lowest castes were Buddhists who had been ostracized for not accepting Hinduism.³⁴ Since Ambedkar's conversion, the faith has undergone a profound revival among *dalits*, who seek to cast off the stigma of their low status and shun the system that degraded them for centuries. As several *dalit* Buddhists noted during conversations with me, they subscribe to Ambedkar's claims and view their conversion as a reconversion to the faith and a reclaiming of their history.³⁵ Due to the *dalit* revival of Buddhism; its associations with Ambedkar, the founder of the modern *dalit* movement; and Ambedkar's assertions that *dalits* were previously Buddhists, Mayawati's *dalit* memorials quote liberally from ancient Indian Buddhist monuments. Ultimately the neo-Buddhist style of Mayawati's memorials makes a *dalit* "presence in time" visual.

"A Modern-day Female Ashoka": Claiming Dalit Space and Establishing a Dalit Style of Architecture

All of Mayawati's sculptures are executed by Ram and Anil Sutar, a father-and-son, Noida-based team. Ram Sutar graduated at the top of his class from one of India's most prestigious art schools, the Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy School of Art, in 1953. Significant to the work he would later do for Mayawati, during the 1950s, Ram Sutar served as modeler for the Department of Archaeology in Aurangabad and restored sculptures in the Ellora and Ajanta caves, which familiarized him with ancient Indian Buddhist art. Since he established his own studio in 1959, Ram Sutar's national fame has grown steadily. He has been commissioned to cast and carve statues and friezes of a diverse range of public and mythological figures throughout India. Sutar is best known for his bust of Gandhi, which has been recast multiple times and which the government of India has given to numerous countries. In 1995 Sutar was awarded the prestigious *Padmashri* medal.³⁶

Mayawati doubtlessly chose the Sutars for their reputation as the most celebrated sculptors to work in a large scale and for the realism, dynamism, and quality materials that characterize their work. That the Sutars are well known for their sculptures of Hindu subjects and high-caste leaders was probably also attractive. Their past work associated Mayawati and her community with the establishment and the galaxy of national heroes. By retaining their services, she effectively communicated that now *dalits* too have access to the finest quality materials and the most sought-after artists to memorialize their heroes.

She was an active agent in the construction and dissemination of her public image. The Sutars and Jay Kaktikar, Mayawati's chief architect, discussed building and decorative styles and their associations with her at great length. She then became highly involved in the design and planning of her commissions.³⁷ While in office, she frequently toured the building sites from the air in her private helicopter. Her commissions certainly have kept the artists in her employ busy. Both Kaktikar and the Sutars work exclusively for her. When Mayawati first retained the Sutars' services in the early 2000s, they only employed twenty-four full-time workers in their foundry, and they only worked during the day. When I met the Sutars in August 2011, when Mayawati was still in office, to keep up with her commissions, they had increased their workforce to one hundred during the day and another one hundred at night. Their foundry was open twenty-fours a day, seven days a week. Still, they were backlogged with work for Mayawati.³⁸

It was not only the rate of her commissions that kept her artists busy, it was their quality. Kaktikar recounts that Mayawati insisted that her projects be constructed with an aim toward permanence. Her great concern was that after her tenure, her non-*dalit* successors would raze what she had built. Her fears were certainly well founded. Throughout India memorial statues of Ambedkar and other *dalit* icons are routinely vandalized—toppled, defaced, or garlanded with rows of shoes, with the aim of insulting them. Only months after she was voted out of office in 2012, statues of Mayawati and Ambedkar were decapitated in Lucknow.³⁹ In an attempt to ensure that Uttar Pradesh was not subjected to further visual programs to erase the *dalits* from Lucknow's built environment, Kaktikar worked with thicker than usual slabs of stone, and the Sutars cast Mayawati's statues and friezes with extra thick bronze.

Mayawati and Kaktikar devised an instantly recognizable style for her architectural commissions through their formal and decorative programs and construction material. Patron and architect perfectly understood the sociopolitical need not only to build but also to claim space and territorially mark it through a sectarian style of architecture. Mayawati's buildings draw heavily from ancient Indian Buddhist architecture, as exemplified by sites such as the Great Stupa at Sanchi (circa first century BCE). Kaktikar notes that he and Mayawati intended to appro-

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6
Bronze sculptures of *dalit* heroes and *chunar* sandstone pillars, outside Mayawati's Rashtriya Dalit Prerna Sthal in Noida

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7
Exterior wall depicting *chandrashala* arch in relief and *vedika* railings from early Indian Buddhist architecture. Sculpture gallery, Ambedkar Memorial

priate this style. Her buildings are not pastiches. Rather than recreating facsimiles of ancient Buddhist structures, Kaktikar combined select features from notable Indian buildings to associate his patron and her community with politically legitimizing models.

The construction materials are uniform light-pink and red sandstone from Karuli, Rajasthan, and buff-colored sandstone from Chunar, Uttar Pradesh. As with all of her commissions, Mayawati's choice of materials was well informed and meaningful. Red sandstone and white marble have been the preeminent building materials for royal and government structures in North India since the fourteenth-century Khilji Sultan Ala-ud-din's commission of the Alai Darwaza at the Qutub complex in Delhi. Following the Khiljis, other Delhi Sultanates, the Mughals, several Rajput dynasties, the British, and finally the independent nation of India employed these building materials for their political structures. Light-pink sandstone is frequently substituted for white marble. Mayawati's use of these materials brings her into the visual language of North Indian rulership.

Chunar sandstone is deeply associated with the third-century BCE Mauryan emperor Ashoka, who was a great patron of Buddhism and its arts. Ashoka raised freestanding columns carved from Chunar sandstone throughout his vast empire upon which were inscribed edicts. In an effort to associate herself with one of the greatest figures from Buddhist history, Mayawati similarly erected dozens of Chunar sandstone columns on the grounds of her monuments (fig. 6). Her pillars are not facsimiles of the Ashokan pillars. While the former are constructed exclusively of sandstone and present a variety of animals, upturned lotuses, and wheels on their capitals, Mayawati's pillars are more uniform. Their bronze capitals are capped by wheels borne on the backs of four addorsed elephants. Here, the elephants carry polysemic meanings: they are symbols of Indic authority; are associated with Ashoka, as they are featured on several of his capitals; and are the BSP party symbol. These messages also are carried by the dozens of life-size, carved stone elephants that punctuate the grounds of Mayawati's buildings. The Ashokan pillars were erected singly, but Mayawati's are in clusters. Furthermore, Kaktikar notes that, per Mayawati's orders, her columns are slightly taller than Ashoka's. The association between Mayawati and Ashoka has not been lost on her community. Biku Chandra Ma, a *dalit* Buddhist monk at the Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar Gomti Buddha Vihar, a monastic residence in Lucknow (commissioned by Mayawati), proudly asserted: "Mayawati is just like a modern-day female Ashoka."⁴⁰ Perhaps the message she seeks to deploy through the abundance, more permanent material

of bronze, and superior height of her pillars is not simply that she is *like* the great emperor, but that she has in fact surpassed him.

In likening herself to great leaders from India's ancient past, Mayawati again subscribes to popular performances of charismatic authority in recent Indian politics. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, is also known to have emulated Ashoka as a model of Indic sovereignty. He chose icons such as the Ashokan lion capital and the wheel to represent the new independent nation.⁴¹ More recently, in 1995, Jayalalitha erected numerous banners and cutouts of herself surrounded by eminent ancient Tamil leaders at the World Tamil Conference in Thanjavur. In several banners, she appeared next to the most celebrated Chola emperor, Raja Raja I (reigned 985–1015 CE) and images of his monumental Brihadeshwara temple.⁴² Like Mayawati's "Ashokan" pillars, Jayalalitha's visual propaganda focused on an ancient leader's monument that signified his glorious rule, constructed a fictive lineage, and presented her own rule as a revival of a Golden Age.⁴³

The exterior parameters of Mayawati's architectural commissions are bound by sandstone railings whose forms and low reliefs of *chaitya* arches are appropriated from the *vedikas* (*stupa* railings) at ancient Buddhist sites such as Sanchi (fig. 7). Because the first phase of construction at the Sanchi Stupa was a Mauryan commission, Mayawati's railings further her Ashokan associations. Like the pillars, the railings are not copied exactly from their original sources. While ancient Buddhist *vedikas* offer detailed reliefs of a variety of subjects associated with Buddhism, those at Mayawati's sites are largely devoid of carvings. Representations of *yakshīs* (fertile nymphs) and other figures from the Buddhist pantheon and scenes from the *jatakas* would be inappropriate at the Ambedkar Memorial and the Prerna Kendra. While informed tangentially by Buddhism, the faith and its architectural styles are employed in the service of politics in Mayawati's commissions. These are not sites built to honor the Buddha. It could even be argued that their ultimate function is not to honor Ambedkar or Kanshi Ram, but Mayawati.

The Ambedkar Memorial and the Prerna Kendra

The Ambedkar Memorial complex is Mayawati's largest and most ambitious commission. Completed in 2008 at an estimated cost of seven billion rupees, the site spans more than twenty-five acres and is enclosed by a *vedika*-like fence.⁴⁴ It is located at the bottom of a hill, next to the Gomti river and beside a flyover, a strategic location that ensures its visibility. The vast, open, granite-lined courts, which are kept scrupulously clean; prominent ticket booths; and monumental entrance gates invite visitors inside. As they travel through, visitors can read about each structure, figures depicted in the statues, and the BSP, and gaze at images of Mayawati inaugurating the complex in the brochures that are given with the entrance tickets.

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Mayawati feeding birthday cake to a sick Kanshi Ram at the Batra Hospital in Delhi. Bronze frieze, sculpture gallery, Ambedkar Memorial

There is also an open-air sculpture gallery, whose walls are adorned with high-relief bronze narrative friezes depicting key events from the political careers of Kanshi Ram and Mayawati. In one, they stand side by side on a stage as Kanshi Ram addresses the assembled, cheering, flag-waving crowd. The accompanying Hindi inscription informs viewers that on December 15, 2001, at Lakshman Mela Ground in Lucknow, Kanshi Ram, the founder of the BSP, named Mayawati as his successor (see fig. 5). Another frieze depicts Mayawati feeding cake to a convalescing Kanshi Ram; the inscription states that this happened on the occasion of his seventieth birthday at Batra Hospital in Delhi (fig. 8). The figures are flanked by plants and diminutive statues of the Buddha, again associating Kanshi Ram and Mayawati with Ambedkar and the faith adopted by so many of their community members.

These friezes establish a highly personal, parental relationship between Kanshi Ram and Mayawati. The frieze depicting the rally maps Mayawati's inheritance of Kanshi Ram's charisma via his designation, while the frieze of her feeding him suggests that she received his charisma via hereditary descent. Significantly, during Jayalalitha's campaign for office in the early 1990s, she commissioned cutouts and banners that placed her next to her political mentor, the much-loved Tamil politician, MGR, whose promotion of Jayalalitha's career paralleled Kanshi Ram's promotion of Mayawati. During her campaign, Jayalalitha was depicted attending to MGR like a dutiful daughter, again mapping the transference of charisma from one political generation to the next.⁴⁵ It is also worth noting that it remains difficult for women to rise to positions of political authority in South Asia. Thus, nearly all female politicians are initiated into politics by elder male relatives, particularly husbands or fathers. Mayawati and Jayalalitha are notable exceptions, and both use public art to create necessary fictive lineages from their male mentors.

The high degree of detail and photorealism displayed by the friezes and their brief, concise text recall photographs and their text captions in newspapers. If, as Roland Barthes argues, a photograph operates as a "certificate of presence," proving that what it depicts happened and who it depicts existed,⁴⁶ newspaper photographs and their captions are ultimate certificates of presence. Mayawati, whose political and personal life is so frequently the subject of media scrutiny, is surely aware of the power of this form of presentation for its believability. The newspaper format allows her to convey in the most convincing format that certain events occurred and that others did not. The presentation of Mayawati as a nurturing, attentive child who feeds her enfeebled, yet smiling father was probably intended to convey an additional message about the nature of their relationship. Several high-ranking

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Bronze sculpture of Bhimrao Ambedkar; the base is inscribed "My life struggle is my message." Ambedkar *stupa*, Ambedkar Memorial

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Ambedkar drafting the Indian constitution. Bronze frieze, Ambedkar *stupa*, Ambedkar Memorial

male members of the BSP have publically accused Mayawati of wielding undue influence over Kanshi Ram and holding him hostage in her house after his stroke.⁴⁷ The newspaper-photograph-like presentation of the frieze showing her feeding him "proves" otherwise.

The Ambedkar Memorial is dominated by a monumental *stupa*, measuring approximately two hundred feet in height. As with the pillars and *vedekās*, the Ambedkar *stupa* appropriates from, but is not a copy of, any specific Indian monument. The most striking difference between the Great Stupa at Sanchi, and the Ambedkar *stupa* is that while the former is comprised of solid hemispherical masses that cannot be entered, the latter is architectural, with a domed central chamber. The Ambedkar *stupa*'s four prominent directional entrances create an imposing, palatial structure. They are accessed by monumental staircases arranged in the form of a lotus blossom, a prominent symbol in Buddhist art.⁴⁸ Significantly, the only way to view the *stupa*'s lotus plan is from the air, which is Mayawati's exclusive vantage point.

The exterior of the Ambedkar *stupa* references a glorious ancient *dalit* past through the appropriation of ancient Indian *stupa* form and decoration, including blind *chandrashala* arches (see fig. 7), a monumental *chandrashala*-arched entrance, and a *harmikā* (square planned fence on top of *stupas*). The *stupa* form has additional, more immediate significance for the *dalit* community, beyond its antiquity: Ambedkar was cremated and his ashes interred in the Chaitya Bhoomi *stupa* at Dadar Choupati, Mumbai.

The interior of the Ambedkar *stupa* is dominated by a twenty-seven-foot-high bronze statue in the round of a seated Ambedkar (fig. 9). Inscribed at the base of the sculpture is the phrase, "My life struggle is my message." Ambedkar never said this; Mayawati devised the phrase, considering it more appropriate than his more famous, somewhat militant galvanizing slogan, "Educate, Organize, Agitate!"⁴⁹ Mayawati's phrase likely is also a rebuttal to the popular Gandhian phrase, "My life is my message." Here, the emphasis is on how Ambedkar struggled and overcame (more so than Gandhi), thereby providing a communal model.

Mayawati intended the Ambedkar statue to be modeled on the sculpture of Abraham Lincoln at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.⁵⁰ The reference is apt. Ambedkar, who was a lawyer, wrote the Indian constitution, and Lincoln, also a lawyer, amended the American constitution to extend rights to all (male) citizens,

including African Americans, after the Civil War. Ambedkar frequently likened Indian *dalits* to African Americans and viewed Lincoln as a champion of the rights of the subalterns in his own nation. Mayawati herself received her LLB and is also an admirer of Lincoln; she sought to link the founder of her movement to a well-known international figure and make the *dalits'* struggle universal.

The central statue is ringed by high-relief bronze friezes on the surrounding walls that depict key events from Ambedkar's life. In one, he sits at a desk, pen in hand, writing the constitution (fig. 10). He is flanked by a map of India, over which is inscribed "Bharat," and a table bearing a Buddha statue and an Ashokan lion capital, which Ambedkar and Nehru promoted as the national icon of independent India. If the iconography is unclear, a Hindi inscription informs the viewer of the events depicted. In another frieze, the viewer is again informed in text and image that Ambedkar is presenting the constitution to President Rajendra Prasad (fig. 11). They are surmounted by the Ashokan lion capital and the circular-planned Indian Parliament House, which crowns the three figures like an honorific umbrella. The bronze friezes within the *stupa* also reference Ambedkar's religious conversion. Wearing monastic robes, Ambedkar stands next to an enshrined image of the Buddha with a monk on the other side (fig. 12). The accompanying inscription informs us that in Nagpur, on October 14, 1956, Ambedkar converted to Buddhism.

Moving in a clockwise direction—the established direction for progressing in Buddhist monuments and thus the logical direction in the Ambedkar *stupa*—the penultimate frieze offers an aerial view of the sprawling memorial complex (the way Mayawati would view the site from her helicopter), with inscriptions naming each structure. An eleven-foot sculpture in the round of Mayawati stands beside the frieze, emphasizing her role as patron. The cycle concludes with eleven-foot sculptures in the round of Mayawati and Kanshi Ram that flank and gesture toward a bronze frieze of the Ambedkar sculpture enshrined within the *stupa* (see fig. 4). The inscriptions inform us that Sushrī (Most Honorable) Mayawati, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, laid the foundation for the *stupa* on August 15, 1995. In publicly laying the memorial's foundation, Mayawati was again participating in an established expression of her charisma, in what Sara Dickey terms Indian "person-centered politics." Participating in public cornerstone-laying ceremonies amid much fanfare is a common means by which an Indian politician spreads awareness of his or her "person."⁵¹ The date of the ceremony is also significant, as it was the anniversary of both Ambedkar's birthday and Indian Independence Day during Mayawati's first year in office.

The centrally located Ambedkar statue and the friezes highlight Ambedkar's various achievements. Ultimately, they link him to Mayawati, whose agency in

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Ambedkar presenting the Indian constitution to President Rajendra Prasad beneath an Ashokan lion capital and the Parliament House. Bronze frieze, Ambedkar *stupa*, Ambedkar Memorial

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Ambedkar converts to Buddhism. Bronze frieze, Ambedkar *stupa*, Ambedkar Memorial

the construction of the very site in which all these sculptures are housed, is underscored at the end of the cycle. Mayawati stands with Kanshi Ram by the bronze frieze depicting the Ambedkar statue, thereby visually mapping the lineage of *dalit* political power from Ambedkar to Kanshi Ram and finally to herself.

Mayawati also uses the Ambedkar *stupa* as a stage for performing her political lineage from Ambedkar. In addition to commencing construction at the site on Ambedkar's birthday and personally laying its foundation stone, Mayawati annually holds ceremonies for Ambedkar's birthday at the complex. During these events, Mayawati, who is accompanied by throngs of party officials, Buddhist monks, and constituents from throughout the state, publicly garlands the main Ambedkar statue and delivers speeches before it.⁵²

Built between 2003 and 2005, the Prerna Kendra is a very different type of structure. The Ambedkar Memorial is open, sprawling, and of a monumental scale. By contrast, the far smaller Prerna Kendra is woven into the dense urban fabric of upper-middle-class apartments and shops in a residential area across Lucknow. With its high, battered surrounding walls, which block visibility from the street, and discreet entrance, the Prerna Kendra is evocative of a fortress. The form of the Ambedkar *stupa* is based on ancient Indian *stupas*. The formal inspiration for the 105-foot-tall steep pyramidal Prerna Kendra was another well-known Buddhist pilgrimage site, the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya. The most important Buddhist pilgrimage site, the temple marks the site of the Buddha's enlightenment, again linking *dalits* to their Buddhist past and a wider international Buddhist community.

The intended audiences of the Ambedkar Memorial and the Prerna Kendra are also different. With its entrance fees and well-run infrastructure, the Ambedkar Memorial was intended as public space for members of the upper and middle castes as well as *dalits*; there Mayawati broadcasts versions of *dalit* history, the achievements of her community members, and her own charisma to the widest possible audience. The Prerna Kendra's entrance is discreet, the building's form is largely obscured by its high outer walls, and the site is frequently closed. It is therefore far less inviting to non-community members.⁵³

Mayawati inaugurated the Prerna Kendra in 2005 during a Buddhist ritual performed by monks. Media coverage of the event noted her benevolence to the monks; she gave them large sums of money, fruit, and umbrellas.⁵⁴ In demonstrat-

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13
Mayawati (second right) with her parents and siblings. Bronze frieze in the Prerna Kendra. Photograph by Arthur Dudney

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Mayawati being sworn in as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh for the third time. Bronze frieze, Prerna Kendra. Photograph by Arthur Dudney

ing such largesse, she again used her architectural commission as a stage to perform her political legitimacy. Not only did she ally with the Buddhist monks, most of whom are former *dalits*, she reminded all that the faith is deeply associated with *dalit* activism. Moreover, in showing such magnanimity, Mayawati was subscribing to a well-established tradition in Indian rulership: generous support of religious organizations and their monastic members.

Inscriptions on a pyramidal marble block on the ground floor offer excerpts from Kanshi Ram's will that state he wanted Mayawati to light his pyre and his ashes to be enshrined in the Prerna Kandra. The will also specifies that Kanshi Ram wanted Mayawati's cremated remains to be enshrined at the site, which will thus transform the Prerna Kendra into a political, dynastic funerary memorial.

In weaving prominent *dalit* memorials into a land that had denied the community a presence in space, Mayawati demanded to be recognized. Weaving *dalit* corporeal remains into Lucknow's urban fabric was an even more assertive gesture. Her sculptural and architectural memorials suggest permanence and, by extension, the irreversible betterment of her community. By interring their ashes in the Prerna Kandra, Kanshi Ram and Mayawati themselves are symbolically eternally present and are always leading their community toward an ever better future. Mayawati was voted out of office in early 2012, but her successor Akhilesh Yadav has affirmed that the new government will not disturb the *dalit* memorials. This is hardly surprising, given that Mayawati vowed on several occasions that there would be major *dalit* protests and communal unrest if her memorials were destroyed.⁵⁵ Her threat was put to the test immediately after her and Ambedkar's statues were vandalized; as she had predicted, her community members retaliated by peacefully demonstrating and blocking roads in Lucknow. Images have power, and Mayawati intends to ensure that their messages will be heard for as long as possible.

Kanshi Ram and Mayawati surely would have been aware of the long history and potentially legitimizing messages of funerary memorials in India. In addition to *stupas*, there are several other types of South Asian funerary memorials. In Islamic India, rulers commissioned lavish, monumental tombs for their late fathers. The formal and decorative programs and construction materials of the Indo-Islamic tombs helped their royal patrons project their own public identities.⁵⁶ Rajput and Maratha kings similarly memorialized their predecessors through cenotaphs (*chattris*) with politically charged forms and decoration.⁵⁷ By installing Kanshi Ram's ashes in the Prerna Kendra, Mayawati appropriated an established royal Indic practice of architectural memorialization. Similar to performing a father's

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Mayawati and the Indian vice president share a meal at the chief minister's house in Lucknow. Bronze frieze, Prerna Kendra. Photograph by Arthur Dudley

funerary rites, commissioning his memorial is a legitimizing act in India that irrefutably establishes dynastic lineage and the transference of political authority from one generation to the next. Thus, in the Indic context, a funerary memorial is an index not only of absence (of the memorialized deceased) but also of presence and legitimate power (of the memorial's heir and patron).

Like those of many other notable examples of Indian funerary architecture, the Prerna Kendra's ultimate message appears to refer more to its patron than the one memorialized. Perhaps even more than the Ambedkar *stupa*, the sculptural program at the Prerna Kendra asserts Mayawati's charisma and ability to lead her party. As noted in a lengthy inscription at the site, the urn with Kanshi Ram's cremated ashes is contained in a marble plinth located in the center of the main chamber on the second floor. The plinth supports three bronze monumental statues in the round. A life-sized Ambedkar is elevated above flanking eighteen-foot statues of Kanshi Ram and Mayawati. The triangular composition, with Ambedkar's raised position, once again visually reiterates the lineage of charismatic leadership in *dalit* politics.

The walls of the Prerna Kendra's chambers, which are spread over three floors, are lined with bronze friezes that feature episodes from Mayawati's life, with an emphasis on major events in her political career. Over the three levels of the Prerna Kendra, the friezes' narrative unfolds in a clockwise direction. Mayawati first appears, uncharacteristically in a sari, on a frieze with an inscription noting that it marks her fiftieth birthday and wishing her congratulations. She then appears with her family in a group portrait as a child (fig. 13); she studies for her exams with a Buddha image on her bookshelf; she is sworn in as chief minister (fig. 14); she dines with high-ranking members of government while in close conversation and laughing (fig. 15), clearly accepted by and completely at ease in these circles of power. The friezes also depict Mayawati's major architectural commissions, again calling attention to her prolific building activity, which has made *dalit* public presence conspicuous, material, and permanent.

Despite the fact that the Prerna Kendra houses his ashes, Kanshi Ram himself makes few appearances in its friezes. When he is depicted, it is during key events that validate Mayawati's political power: when he publically declared her as his successor, and when she cared for him during his illness as if she were his child. In fact, Kanshi Ram appears most frequently in the friezes as a corpse and as cremated ashes. Mayawati first mourns over her mentor's corpse, she lights his pyre, she places the cremated ashes on an altar before the Buddha and finally in the Prerna

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Mayawati overseeing preparations of Kanshi Ram's corpse for his cremation. Bronze frieze in the Prerna Kendra. Photograph by Arthur Dudney

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Mayawati helps with the preparations of Kanshi Ram's corpse: "In accordance with his wishes, Mayawati oversees everything." Bronze frieze in the Prerna Kendra. Photograph by Arthur Dudney

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Mayawati is draped with a *mala* (garland) made of one thousand rupee notes on the occasion of Kanshi Ram's birthday and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the BSP, for which she organized a public rally in Lucknow. Photograph by Arthur Dudney

Kendra (figs. 16, 17). The funerary friezes all carefully record in Hindi that Kanshi Ram's last rites were done in accordance with his wishes.

The final frieze in the program presents Mayawati in one of her most controversial and well-documented performances of charismatic authority (fig. 18). She is well known and frequently criticized for allowing herself to be festooned with colossal garlands made from countless one thousand rupee notes. Each garland has an estimated value of between \$500,000 to \$2 million. Since 2010, Mayawati has accepted these money garlands, which the BSP claims represent donations from party members, at public events like political rallies and celebrations of Kanshi Ram's birthday.⁵⁸ In what have become iconic media images, she appears flanked by aides who hoist the cumbersome money garland over her shoulders. Mayawati raises one arm and holds her hand in a gesture that parallels the one displayed by the Ambedkar statues she commissions, again visually linking these two political figures.

Mayawati's detractors sharply criticize such performances as vulgar and inappropriate, particularly because she claims to represent the poorest and most disadvantaged members of Indian society. Moreover, when she accepted the garlands, she was chief minister of one of the poorest states in the nation. Mayawati has remained silent on the subject of the money garlands. However, it is worth considering that, because *dalits* historically have been denied access to vast sums of money and political authority, their chosen representative's conspicuous display of both announces their assertion of their power and defiance in the face of criticism.

In her performances of such conspicuous displays of wealth Mayawati again draws from models of ancient Indic kingship, which are being revived by democratically elected politicians. Weber observed followers' donations of large sums of cash and luxury items as recognition of their leaders' charisma.⁵⁹ Beyond signifying Mayawati's wealth and charismatic authority, the money garlands are metonyms that signify the prosperity her community members may now legitimately claim through her leadership. In models of traditional Indic kingship, the ruler's body and his state were to an extent conflated. It was therefore a royal responsibility to appear in public "in the beauty and dazzle of his person,"⁶⁰ to amass wealth, and stage awesome performances of conspicuous consumption to convey the well-being of the state. Established in ancient India, royal acts of conspicuous displays of wealth continued to hold currency into the colonial period. The practice is enjoying a resurgence under Jayalalitha⁶¹ and Mayawati. Indian media frequently covers the

spectacular decorations and gifts Jayalalitha's supporters bestow upon her during public appearances: her route to the venue is bedecked with illuminated triumphal arches, her footpath strewn with flowers and the air perfumed. After mounting a lavishly decorated stage, she is given gold coins, reminiscent of performances of support by subjects to their kings, and a silver-plated scepter, a traditional symbol of kingship in India.⁶² Mayawati has claimed that she amasses her personal wealth on behalf of her community, making her ostentatious displays of wealth symbols of *dalit* pride and empowerment.⁶³

That the frieze cycle at the Prerna Kendra concludes with this iconic image of Mayawati's power, wealth, and charisma is fitting. As with the statues and friezes in the Ambedkar *stupa*, those in the Prerna Kendra laud the achievements of previous *dalit* leaders and activists, but ultimately map a trajectory to Mayawati as their rightful heir. Her money garlands announce her charisma and the upward mobility she secures for her community. As with other aspects of her commissions—scale, semantic content of the inscriptions, durability of materials, and overall cost—her money-garland frieze surpasses its models.

Conclusion

Monuments ensure that the memories of those they commemorate and their patrons remain. They thus possess enormous potential for communal mobilization, empowerment, and pride. The Nawabs of Awadh left their impress on Lucknow's visual landscape through their *imambaras* (congregation halls for Shia commemoration ceremonies for Muharram) and the Rumi Darwaza. The British are remembered in Lucknow through their Residency and several government buildings. Mayawati's memorials now join these sites, as well as the Taj Mahal, on the official website of the U.P. State Tourist Board, indicating that they are worth visiting by those seeking permanent, visual traces of the state's history.⁶⁴

Whatever her ultimate political fate and enduring legacy, Mayawati has given *dalits* an equitable share in the urban fabric of one of India's largest cities. In Lucknow, *dalits* now have their own monumental spaces, defined by a communal style of architecture, spaces where they can be ennobled by the BSP's version of their history. Mayawati announces messages of *dalit* pride and empowerment through a visual language that is at once recognizably authoritative and unique to the *dalit* experience. She claims to speak for her community. In flaunting her command of the very best materials and artistic skill as well as her lavish displays of personal wealth, she participates in well-established acts of upper-class privilege and entitlement.

It is too soon to assess how successful Mayawati's commissions will be for her community. Will they persuade more members of the non-*dalit* Indian public to

accept the historical figures they commemorate, such as Ambedkar, as national heroes? To return to Farrar, it remains to be seen if, through Mayawati's memorials, *dalits* actually will be granted a legitimate history and their voices thus will cease to be "considered marginal to the main event." Surely the greatest mark of their success would be if they could actually alter the quotidian realities of living community members.

It appears that Mayawati's memorials failed in what may have been their patron's greatest aim—to secure her continued leadership of Uttar Pradesh. Perhaps, in the end, her commissions announced her wealth too well. Her political opponents claim that she focused on her memorials at the cost of more immediate needs—for example, land reform and grooming other *dalits* for leadership. One political commentator alleged, "Mayawati only made statues. That is her only achievement."⁶⁵

Although for now Mayawati has been divested of her political power, there is wide speculation that she has designs on becoming the prime minister of India.⁶⁶ It is worth considering what impact this would have on the built environment of New Delhi.

NOTES

AUTHOR'S NOTE: All photographs were taken by the author unless otherwise stated. Those not taken by the author have been reproduced with the photographer's permission. I would like to thank Rebecca M. Brown and my two blind reviewers at *Ars Orientalis* for their careful reading of earlier drafts of this essay and for making thoughtful comments and suggestions.

- 1 Margaret E. Farrar, *Building the Body Politic: Power and Urban Space in Washington, D.C.* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2008), 38.
- 2 Although her surname is Das, Mayawati is referred to exclusively by her first name.
- 3 Manuela Ciotti, "Futurity in Words: Low-Caste Women Politicians Self-representation and Post-Dalit Scenarios in North India," *Contemporary South Asia* 18, no. 1 (2010), 44–45.
- 4 James Fontanella-Khan, "India's 'Dalit Queen' in Statues Scandal," *Financial Times*, May 18, 2012, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/6eb55f42-a0c5-11e1-851f-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1w1zy9L7b>.
- 5 Fontanella-Khan, "India's 'Dalit Queen' in Statues Scandal."
- 6 Farrar, "The Infrastructure of the Political," in *Building the Body Politic*, 1–19.
- 7 A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons, trans., Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Free Press, 1947), 358–59.
- 8 Weber, *The Theory*, 365.
- 9 Weber, *The Theory*, 362–63.
- 10 I am not suggesting that Mayawati or her artists are following or are even aware of Weber's concepts of charismatic authority. Rather, Weber noted these characteristics, performances, and claims to authority as consistent traits among many historic leaders.
- 11 See, for example, Amy Kazmin, "India's Palaces of the Untouchables," *Financial Times*, June 4, 2009, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/e01f13f0-44d7-11de-82d6-00144feabdc0.html#axzz253vybPON>.
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- 14 Gary Michael Tartakov, "Art and Identity: the Rise of a New Buddhist Imagery," *Art Journal* 49, no. 4 (winter 1990), 409–16; Tartakov, "The Politics of Popular Art: Maharashtra," in *Twentieth Century Indian Sculpture: The Last Two Decades*, ed. Shivaji K. Panikkar (Mumbai: Marg, 2000), 100–107.
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- 19 Tartakov discusses how Ambedkar's gesture of holding up his finger is a polysemic sign, drawing from and referring to both classical Roman sculptures as well as the *tarjanī mudrā*, which the Buddha frequently exhibits to denote teaching; "The Politics of Popular Art: Maharashtra," 102.
- 20 Jaoul, "Learning the Use of Symbolic Means," 179–84.
- 21 Sikata Banerjee, *Make Me a Man! Masculinity, Hinduism, and Nationalism in India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 113.
- 22 Banerjee, *Make Me a Man!*, 3, 139–53.
- 23 As Banerjee explains, traditionally in Hinduism widows are necessarily celibate as they did not typically remarry and thus did not engage in sexual activity. Widows are therefore effectively desexed and able to participate in Indian politics; *Make Me a Man!*, 114.
- 24 Preminda Jacob, *Celluloid Deities: The Visual Culture of Cinema and Politics in South India* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009).
- 25 Jacob, *Celluloid Deities*, 213.
- 26 The term "scheduled caste" refers to groups of historically disadvantaged people recognized by the Indian Constitution. *Dalits* are among them.
- 27 Hardtman, "Dalit Feminism in a Neoliberal World," in *The Dalit Movement in India*, 208–26.
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- 29 Hardtman, *The Dalit Movement in India*, 222.
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- 31 Bose, *Behenji*, 141.
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- 34 Bhimrao Ambedkar, *Who Were the Shudras? How They Came to Be the Fourth Varna in the Indo-Aryan Society* (Bombay: Thackers, 1970); Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution*, 22–23.
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