

# 'AMBEDKAR TOURIST CIRCUIT ONLY AIDS NATIONALISTIC NARRATIVE'

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Place of pilgrimage: Ambedkar's memorial in his birthplace Mhow in Madhya Pradesh is frequented by Buddhists, Dalits and Ambedkarites. a.m. FARUQUI FARUQUI AM

The Central government has announced a special tourist circuit encompassing five key sites associated with Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Dalit scholars and Ambedkarites, however, argue that the five spots or the "Panchateerths" selected for the circuit do not do justice to Ambedkar's "real legacy" and have been chosen to just fit into the "localised and nationalistic" narrative of the government.

According to Ambedkar scholars, there are a host of other sites like Raigarh district of Maharashtra where Dr. Ambedkar led the Mahad Satyagraha, Pune where he held the first negotiations with Mahatma Gandhi in Yerwada jail on a separate electorate for depressed classes, and Sri Lanka where he attended a Buddhist conclave.

Ashok Bharti, Founder and Chairperson of NACDOR (National Confederation of Dalit and Adivasi Organisations), said, "People who have not read Dr. Ambedkar and his work have made this concept (of the tourist circuit) in a hurry. They should have consulted organisations and people who are thorough with his work and life."

## Places of import

The five cities in the tourist circuit as announced by the government are Mhow (his birthplace), London (where he resided and studied), Nagpur (also studied here), Delhi (where he passed away) and finally Mumbai (where he was cremated).

These sites are already visited by Dalits as pilgrimage spots; the idea is to attract members of the public from outside the Dalit community, a senior official of the Ministry of Tourism said.

According to Chandrabhan Prasad, Dalit ideologue, "This is mere symbolism. It is a bid to subvert and distort Dalit historical landmarks. I would prefer that the tourist circuit begins from the *Mahar talab andolan*. One of the greatest incidents of expression of freedom for Dalits."

Mahad Satyagraha was a *satyagraha* led by Dr. Ambedkar on March 20, 1927 to allow untouchables to use water in a public tank in Mahad, currently in Raigarh district of Maharashtra. Pune is another landmark place.

Similar is the case of Kolhapur where in March 1920, another legendary social reformer, Chatrapati Shahuji Maharaj, declared Dr. Ambedkar as the true leader of the oppressed classes in India.

Going further, Rajesh Liloithia, Head of Congress SC department, said that if the government wants to do true justice to Dr. Ambedkar's legacy, they should dedicate the Central Vista to Dr. Ambedkar.

## Modi and Ambedkar

Since assuming office in 2014, the Modi government has celebrated Ambedkar — unveiling his portrait in Parliament's Central Hall and developing Deeksha Bhoomi as an international tourist centre.

Last week, former President Ram Nath Kovind released a book *Ambedkar & Modi: Reformer's Ideas, Performer's Implementation* .

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