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'The Rajghat of Mumbai'

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Where there is a mill there is not always a mall, sometimes there can be a memorial, as proven by the one being built in honour of Dr B R Ambedkar at Indu Mill, which is gaining traction ahead of its 2020 deadline



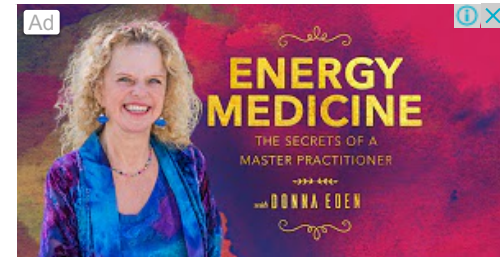
A 25-foot model of Dr B R Ambedkar statue at the Sutar's Noida studio

The Mumbai skyline is in perennial flux, but even within the change, one aspect has become an enduring feature — a majority of mills symbolic of Mumbai's titan of textiles status have been transformed into malls. "Not all of them become malls though," laughed architect Amol Prabhu, partner at Shashi Prabhu and Associates (SRA) from his office, under the bleachers of Wankhede Stadium, adding, "Some of them become memorials."

Towering Personality

Prabhu was referring to the Indu Mill, at Shivaji Park in Dadar, which is in the midst of a two-year makeover to become a memorial for Dr B R Ambedkar. The deadline for the memorial's completion is April 2020.

The mill, "Is going to be transformed into the Amedkar memorial. It must, in brick and mortar, reflect his personality and vision, besides of course, his enduring appeal and relevance today," said Prabhu.



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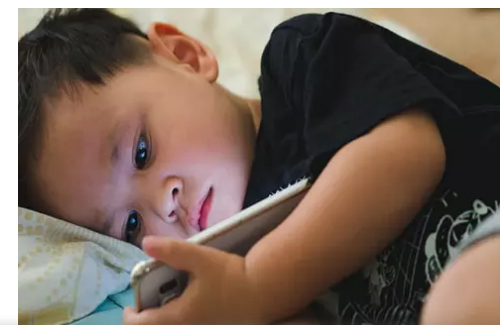
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Work on at Indu Mill for the memorial that will also have a 1,000-seater auditorium and research centre. PIC/ SHADAB KHAN

Prabhu added, "The feature that will tower over the site is a statue of Ambedkar, the exact height of which is still being determined."

While Prabhu was circumspect about all the controversy from 2011 about the Indu Mill site — there have been a number of protests by different sections of Ambedkar followers — he did say that, "This is a public project and a public space. Numerous players are involved. In a project of this import and magnitude, it is vital that we take people along and strike a balance."

The Plans

Prabhu said, "The memorial is on the scale of Rajghat in New Delhi. But this one will be truly international. I have lived and worked in the USA for 16 years and will bring some of that into the work here."



Amol Prabhu at the Indu Mill site (Pic/Shadab Khan)



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However, Anandraj Ambedkar, the grandson of Babasaheb Ambedkar and chief of the Republican Sena, struck a discordant note as he said, "This land was given to followers after a slew of protests and demonstrations. We think it is not befitting international standards. The followers of the Ambedkar movement too must be taken into consideration for a project of this stature."

Cast In China

Speaking about the statue, Anil Sutar, of Ram Sutar Art Creations, said, "A 25-foot bronze statue of Ambedkar is ready at our Noida studio. The contractors for the project (Shapoorji Pallonji) wanted a model that is one-tenth of the height of the proposed statue to be placed at Indu Mills. We created this design and it was passed. We have been told that the bronze statue would be 250 feet high. The casting process is going to take place in China, for quality control."

A Shapoorji Pallonji representative said the memorial will be, "unique" and the statue, "is likely to be 350 feet, which is equivalent to a 35-storey building. It will be cast in China. There is still some debate about the height of the statue. Ancillary structures, like the 1,000-seater auditorium and research centre have all been conceptualised and designed to give a 360-degree window into the life and times of Ambedkar."

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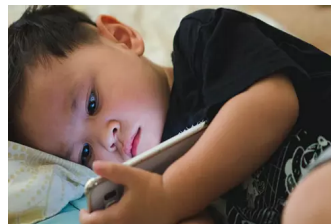
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