



When Gandhi's statue is removed in Ghana

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When Gandhi's statue is removed in Ghana-It is a reminder of his subsequent evolution, and India's changed place in the world today

- We remember Gandhi's concern with the liberation of Indians from colonial rule, as well as from the dark underside of our own personalities.
- We also remember that he failed to engage with the plight of Africans in a colonized South Africa, where he lived for 21 years.
- We know that he used disparaging language for Africans. For these and related reasons his statue was brought down by academics and students at the University of Ghana, Accra earlier this month.
- The act may be reversed, but it prompts a rethink.
- We have to recognise the flaws in Gandhi's approach to Africa the way we recognise the Eurocentrism of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the great 19th century German philosopher.
- Hegel's views on India are of some significance because philosophy departments established in Indian universities in the 19th century were heavily influenced by Hegelian and Kantian intellectual traditions.
- These departments trained students who went on to become leaders of the freedom struggle.
- One of the recurrent themes in nationalist self-representation is the greatness of ancient India and consequent decline.
- Shades of Eurocentrism continue to shape perceptions of who we are, where we have come from, and how we can recover greatness.

Africa, then and now

- Whereas the questions political philosophy asks of the human condition (for example, liberation) are eternal, the answers offered by political thinkers are bound by reasons of time and space.
- We have to locate a body of thought in its political and intellectual context.
- Gandhi's thought and attitude were also the product of his age, and as

imperfect as our past and current philosophies are.

- Still, right-thinking Indians should reflect on whether we need to apologise to our African colleagues for the mistakes that Gandhi made a century ago.

In Tripura

- The present holders of political power in India should be able to comprehend the impact of the latter part of the statement — they are the original expounders of a narrow nationalism.
- In March 2018, two statues of the leader of the mammoth struggle against Tsarist Russia, Vladimir Lenin, were brought down in Tripura by supporters of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that had swept to power in the State.
- The demolition of Lenin's statues was justified by BJP leaders on the ground that he was not an Indian, never mind that the man had led a massive struggle of the poor and the oppressed against imperial Russia and established a worker's state.
- It degenerated just like states established by right-wing forces have deteriorated. But there is no denying the genius of a man who could inspire millions of people to raise their heads and speak back to oppression.
- Lenin's and Gandhi's thought will continue to inspire the poor and the marginalised whether or not there are statues in their name.
- The setting up of a statue is, after all, more an assertion of the petty vanities of people in power, than homage to the person whose statue it is.

A rejection of India?

- However, in Ghana something else is going on.
- This was clear in the petition drafted by academics at the University of Ghana.
- They not only rejected Gandhi, they rejected India.
- The petition, which was signed by more than 2,000 people, stated that it is better to stand up for African dignity than to kowtow to the wishes of a burgeoning Eurasian superpower.
- There was a time when India under Jawaharlal Nehru had stood for the rights of all people in the postcolonial world.
- Today the Government of India has made it clear that it is interested in little but acquiring profits through trade, and in securing acres of land

for Indian industrialists in countries of Sub-Saharan Africa.

- India has lost out on solidarity, it is now seen as a state interested only in gleaning profit from other countries with whom it shares a notorious history of colonialism.

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