Gandhi in Ghana

Why in news?

Recently, a statue of Mahatma Gandhi has been removed from most prestigious Ghana University.

What is the background?

- India's former president Pranab Mukherjee had unveiled the statue of the Mahatma Gandhi's Statute at the University of Ghana in Accra two years ago.
- It was seen as a symbol of close ties between the two nations.
- However lecturers soon began a petition calling for its removal, citing passages written by Mahatma Gandhi claiming that Indians were "infinitely superior" to black Africans.
- They cited two reasons: one, Gandhi was racist; and two, the government of Ghana should privilege African heroes and heroines over foreigners.
- The head of language, literature and drama at the Institute of African Studies said the removal was an issue of "self-respect".

What does it mean for 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.
- Now, India is seen as a state interested only in gleaning profit from other countries with which it shares a notorious history of colonialism.
- India needs to show solidarity towards the African countries who are witnessing colonialism to mature democracy.

Was Mahatma Gandhi racist?

- The legacy of Mahatma Gandhi is mixed in Africa.
- In this case professors, students and Ghanaians railed against the statue, calling it homage to a racist who thought of Africans as naked savages who were beneath both Britons and Indians.
- They used Gandhi's early writings from his two decades in Africa to bolster

their arguments.

- In his twenties,Mahatma Gandhi believed in a hierarchy of civilizations, with Europeans at the top, Indians just below them, and Africans absolutely at the bottom.
- He spoke of the native inhabitants of Africa in patronizing and even pejorative language.
- However, by the time he was in his mid-thirties, Gandhi no longer spoke of Africans as inferior to Indians.
- The evolution of his views finds expression in a fascinating speech delivered by Gandhi at the Johannesburg YMCA in May 1908.
- Gandhi may have been the only non-white present; he was certainly the only non-white speaker.
- He opposed the motion and pointed out that the labor of Africans and Asians had made the Empire what it was.
- He also said "South Africa would probably be a howling wilderness without the Africans."
- So by 1908, Gandhi was clear that Africans as well as Indians needed to be placed on an absolutely equal footing with Europeans.
- In another speech made in Germiston 1908, he said that if the Africans took to non-violent resistance against racial discrimination, "there would probably be no native question left to be solved".
- Judging based upon considering only those comments that are discriminatory is not fair.
- The thought process of our Father of nation evolved over a period as it happened with all the liberated souls in the world.

Source: The Hindu, Telegraph

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