

Statues of Gandhiji, padyatris in state of neglect at Dandi school

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Dandi: On way to the historic Saifee Villa in Dandi, Mahatma Gandhi's abode during the salt satyagrah in 1930, it is hard to miss the noise of students at Vinay Mandir School run by Keshavn Mandal.

However, these 230-odd students from Dandi and nearby villages fall silent when they pass by a 60x40 structure located in the middle of the campus. Wrapped in the rug bags and covered with plastic, 40 life-size statues of marchers have been left at the mercy of the weather gods. Just a few metres away from the structure, once a workshop building used by the students for extra-curricular activities, lies a makeshift structure where the 16.5 feet statue of Mahatma Gandhi has been kept for more than a year now, also wrapped in plastic.

These statues are a part of Dandi Memorial Project funded by Union government and being implemented by IIT-Bombay under the High-Level Dandi Memorial Committee (HLDMC) to mark the historic Dandi March by Gandhiji in 1930. A memorial to mark the historic Dandi March is proposed to be built on a 15-acre plot in Dandi — the site where Gandhiji and his fellow marchers picked up salt from the sea beach to break the salt



Statues wrapped in rug bags and plastic have been left in a workshop

law of British Raj. The project has been delayed and the school management is finding it hard to preserve the statues.

Vinay Mandir secretary Dhirubhai Patel, 86, is taking care of the statues single-handedly. The Gandhian wants the work on the memorial project to be completed at the earliest. "It gives me immense pain to see these statues lying in such a state on the campus. They are languishing here for the last many months. It has become a challenge for me to preserve them until their installation," Dhirubhai Patel said.

The setting up of the memorial at Dandi was announced by the Government of India around 2003. Over the years, HLDMC had sought proposals for the memorial from various artists, but none of the proposed memorials were feasible. It was

in 2011, that the IIT-Bombay got associated with the design, technical and art components of the project guided by the HLDMC. The sculptures of the marchers were created by a team of national and international sculptors after considerable research in two months time in November-December 2013.

"Various technical aspects of the project require environmental clearance, soil testing, wind-tunnel testing for structural stability, custom design, solar trees and lighting fixtures. They have been completed and detailed drawing submitted to CPWD. We are awaiting tendering for actual construction of the memorial at Dandi. The civil work is yet to start but the memorial will be ready by 2019," IIT-Bombay professor Raja Mohanty said.