

small world



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The Unknown Dandi Marchers

PROJECT How a team of researchers traced the eighty freedom fighters who accompanied Gandhi

ON 12 MARCH 1930, Mohandas Gandhi led a group of 80 individuals from the Sabarmati Ashram in Gujarat on a 24-day walk to reach Dandi where they broke India's then salt laws. The Dandi March has an iconic status in the history of modern India but apart from Gandhi, very little is known about who the other marchers were.

A project currently underway in IIT Bombay is seeking to identify and commemorate the other marchers. Drawing upon over two years of research, 46 artists have

finished preparing life-size sculptures of the 80 marchers. This Ministry of Culture-backed project titled Dandi Salt Satyagraha Memorial will also feature a 15-foot statue of Gandhi and 24 murals depicting important scenes from the march. Once complete, the memorial will be shifted to Dandi.

Professor Kirti K Trivedi, convener of the memorial, along with students from IIT's Industrial Design Centre and the staff of consultancy firm Design & People, pored over books and periodicals of that time, sought help from

research institutes, went through video footage of the march, and visited the places where the marchers were supposed to hail from. They interviewed as many surviving family members and friends they could find. Sethu Das of Design & People describes how difficult it was to locate a picture of a man listed as Raghavan in a periodical. "I just couldn't find any picture of his. One day I went to visit an old school-teacher at Thrissur who I had heard possessed a *charkha* used by Gandhiji. It turned out he was a friend of Raghavan and

possessed a portrait of his," Das says.

There was also confusion about the exact number of participants in the march. Many records said there were 78 marchers, but the researchers discovered two more—Kharag Bahadur Singh Giri from Nepal and Satish Kalelkar from Maharashtra.

Trivedi says, "Here was this all-important moment in history and almost no one can even recall its participants. Perhaps this memorial will help change that." ■

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