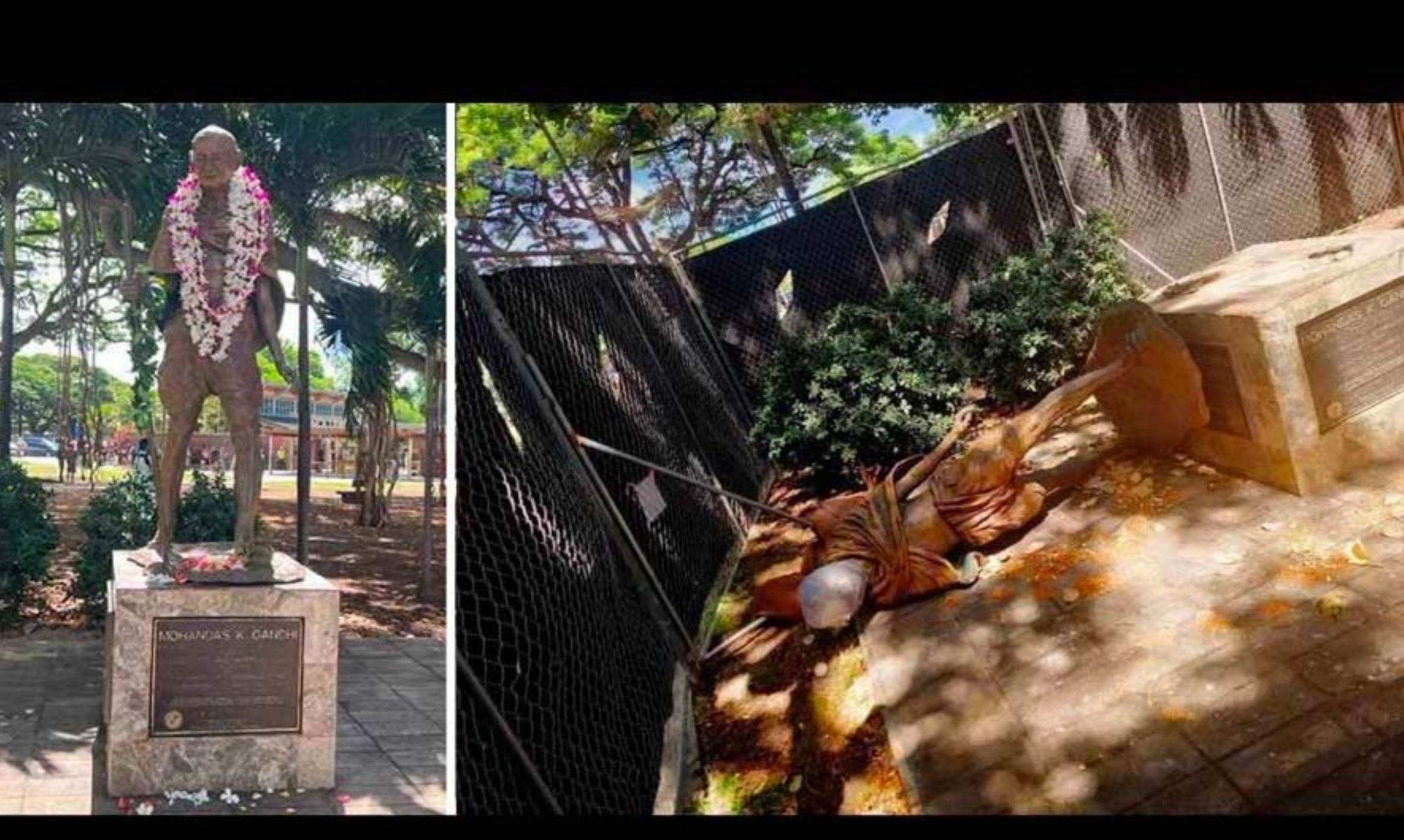


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What Really Happened To The Mahatma Gandhi Statue In Hawaii?



1 Comment September 14, 2023

By REENA RATHORE
 HONOLULU, HI – In 2022, Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh and India's Ambassador to the U.S., Taranjit Singh Sandhu, draped Hawaiian leis and lit candles at Mahatma Gandhi's statue in Waikiki here. A year later, the life-sized bronze statue dedicated to the global peace icon was found ripped from its plinth, lying sideways on the ground after purported vandals took aim at it.

The incident occurred at some point between August 7 night and August 8 morning.
 The statue, located under a banyan tree, depicted Gandhi in his simplistic garb, in reference to his 1930 march against the salt tax in India.

The U.S. has the largest number of Gandhi statues outside India, and they have been a target of repeated acts of vandalism.
 Fencing off the site, the culture and arts department of the City and County of Honolulu initiated the process of the restoration work after Dr. Raj Kumar, founder and president emeritus of the Gandhi International Institute of Peace, brought it to their attention Aug. 9. However, lack of funding is holding up work.

The statue by the Honolulu Zoo, which was sculpted in 1989 by artist Stephen C Lowe, had several plaques set at its base, serving as a history lesson on Gandhi. One such plaque described Hawaii as being a most appropriate home for his statue, saying his "life and values are in complete harmony with the spirit of Aloha."

Kumar told **India-West** that he, along with the Indian American community, was "shocked" when they learned about this destructive act.
 "It has never happened in the last 35 years. It hurts to see the Gandhi statue damaged and be in this condition. We just cannot digest or say it just fell because of gusty winds or something because no electric pole or tree fell in the same neighborhood. It happened at night, and it looks like it was done by somebody on purpose," Kumar noted. "But since there is no witness to say that it was pushed or toppled down by somebody, we cannot conclude what really happened. But if this is an act of vandalism, it is unacceptable to us. We cannot ignore it."

Kumar added that while they request the law enforcement agencies in Hawaii and the FBI to bring the perpetrators to justice as soon as possible, they also hope the mayor and the city and county of Honolulu take preventative measures such as installing cameras around the site and increasing patrolling which would act as a deterrent to further incidents.

Kumar pointed out that in the last 7 years, several incidents such as this one have happened across the world, including in India. "This looks like a global conspiracy," he told **India-West**.

The motivation for the alleged vandalism is unclear and Honolulu Police have not publicly acknowledged their investigation into this incident.

"The mayor's office has not gotten back to me either," Kumar told **India-West**. "It's been over a month, and we have not heard a single word from the Honolulu police. It should not take that long since Hawaii is an international place, and such an incident would affect the reputation of the people of Hawaii as well as the local govt. But we are not pointing a finger at anybody as this is a time to work together and make sure it does not happen again."

KITV4 News Clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y2yH3YLwka8>
India-West reached out to Honolulu Police and the FBI for any updates on charges and arrests related to this incident.

The FBI told **India-West** they are aware of the incident and "take allegations of federal criminal violations seriously." However, they could not confirm or deny whether or not the agency was conducting an investigation.

"The FBI reviews allegations of criminal conduct for their merit and, when warranted, conducts further investigation," the Public Affairs Office of FBI's Honolulu division stated in its response.

When Kusha Devi Dasi, the president of the ISKCON Hawaii temple, heard about the incident, she was appalled and immediately alerted the FBI.

"Gandhi stands for peaceful resolution to conflict for the world...he is the epitome, the icon for peaceful resolution so how could somebody do something like that," she told **India-West**. "I've been going to these meetings with the FBI about hate crimes, so it seemed to me that this was a hate crime and I asked if this is an isolated incident and they said, 'No. It's happening all over the world.'"

Further underscoring the importance of Gandhi's legacy, Kusha Devi, who spent several years in India, characterized these acts as demoralizing, saying "Someone comes and breaks his legs, puts him on the ground defacing him as if to abolish and break our faith in goodness."

The perpetrators need to be held accountable, she said, adding that the entire Indian population should stand up and say, "We want justice." Statue after statue of Gandhi is being desecrated, from New York to California to Canada, and these hateful attacks must stop, she emphasized.

"Who is doing these things? What do these people need. What is the message," she asked. "This can't go on. We need to get to the bottom of this and stop it in its tracks. The only way they will be caught is if we stand up and make noise. In this day and age, when things are confusing and chaotic, we need these symbols to help us stay strong in the face of adversity. We need to rally around truth and goodness and embrace something that is imperfect but still stands for something great because none of us are perfect. He stood up for something that he believed in. What do we believe in?"

Kusha Devi and Kumar are hopeful that the FBI will be able to connect the dots and get to the bottom of it all. In his pursuit to bring the truth out, Kumar also reached out to Governor Josh Green, who offered his support if needed.

GIIP, which seeks to raise awareness about nonviolence and promote world peace, has been hosting an annual program to commemorate the birth anniversary of Gandhi since 2006. "Global Peace" is the theme this year, which will mark the 154th birthday of Gandhi and will feature spiritual invocation, chanting, yoga, music, cultural dance, and speeches by interfaith leaders and various scholars.

The city has assured Kumar that the statue would be temporarily placed at the site ahead of the celebration on October 1.
 In April 2015, former Governor of Hawaii David Y. Ige signed Senate bill SB 332 into ACT 5 and officially recognized Oct. 2 as "Mahatma Gandhi Day," making Hawaii the first state in the U.S. to pass such a bill.

The dignitaries that have paid their respects at the site in the past include former Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard, former Congressman Neil Abercrombie and Dr. Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi. Governor Josh Green and Congressman Ed Case have attended GIIP's annual event as chief guests.

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 Maneck Bhujwala Reply
 From what I have heard in the past, some people have feelings of anger about Mahatma Gandhi because according to them he allowed the partition of Punjab to take place.
 As we know in history, Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated because some people were angry against him, as they believed that he was giving away too much to Pakistan during the partition of India.
 To keep things in perspective, we should remember that the whole of Sind province was given away to the new Pakistan, even though in our National Anthem, we include Sind as part of India ("Punjab, Sind, Gujarat, Maratha,"), and the non-Muslim people of Sind became refugees in India, but they have not shown any violence or hate against Mahatma Gandhi.
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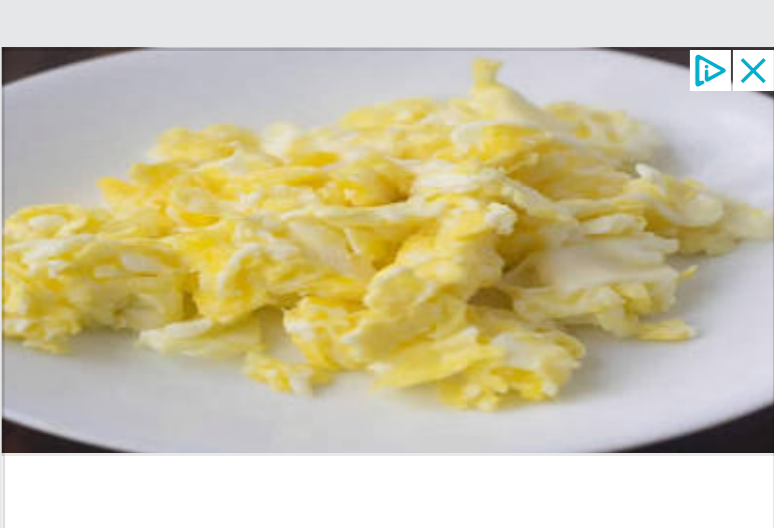
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