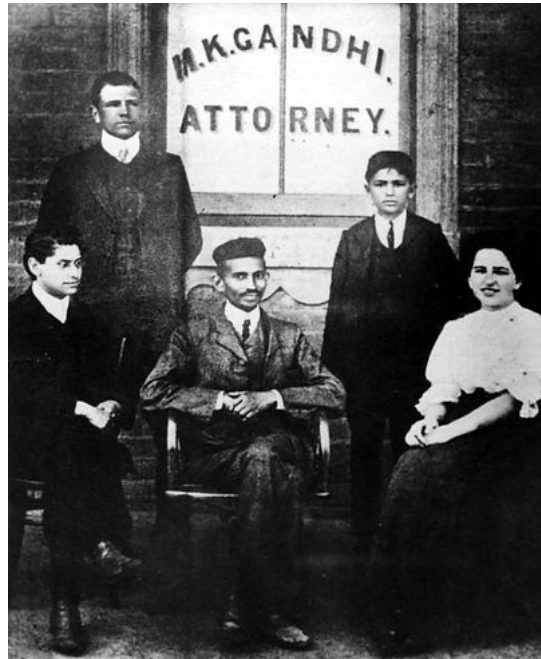




India and South Africa

[Frederick Lauritzen](#)

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South Africa and India both have elections which will be completed by May 29th and June 1st respectively. These two countries will collaborate more closely because the Suez Canal has become impractical given the dangers of the region and the increased insurance costs of goods travelling by cargo ship ([India by sea or by Land? \(September 29th, 2023\)](#)).

The two countries have a deep connection. The ancient Indian language, Sanskrit, from which most Indian languages derive, is protected by the South African Constitution. It is the only country other than India that gives an official (minority) status to the ancient language. ([Classical Languages of India and EU \(August 11th, 2023\)](#))

This minority status is due to the important presence of an Indian and specifically Hindu community in South Africa. The immensely wealthy Gupta family is said to have connections with the former president Jacob Zuma and his administration. The route from Cape of Good Hope to India was established when the Portuguese discovered it in 1487 thereby connecting Europe to India. This is now the safest route for most cargo ships. ([Gaza and India \(October 20th, 2023\)](#))



One of the oldest written texts in Afrikaans Language (the Dutch spoken in Cape Colony) was written in Arabic script, known as Arabic Afrikaans. This was the lingua franca used by the Malay community living in Cape Town. They had reached South Africa by navigating along the Indian route. The Malay community was classified as 'coloured' (Kleurlinge) in the 'apartheid' system. This was the same category to which Indians belonged.

This classification of people was disturbing for Mohandas 'Mahatma' Gandhi when he moved to South Africa to practice as a barrister. He was not allowed to work outside the confines of the 'coloured' community. He reached South Africa in 1893 and remained there until 1915. These were his formative years. It was in Johannesburg that he read Tolstoy's famous 'letter to a Hindu' ('Письмо к индусу' 1908) which inspired his non-violent revolution (सत्याग्रह [Satyāgraha] adherence to truth) based on readings of Sanskrit holy writings.

In 1909, Gandhi concluded his introduction to this text with the following words:

'One need not accept all that Tolstoy says--some of his facts are not accurately stated--to realize the central truth of his indictment of the present system, which is to understand and act upon the irresistible power of the soul over the body, of love, which is an attribute of the soul, over the brute or body force generated by the stirring in us of evil passions.

There is no doubt that there is nothing new in what Tolstoy preaches. But his presentation of the old truth is refreshingly forceful. His logic is unassailable. And above all he endeavours to practice what he preaches. He preaches to convince. He is sincere and in earnest. He commands attention.'

Tolstoy had quoted several Sanskrit texts in his letter among which he claims the following:

"O ye who sit in bondage and continually seek and pant for freedom, seek only for love. Love is peace in itself and peace which gives complete satisfaction. I am the key that opens the portal to the rarely discovered land where contentment alone is found. Krishna."

The South African constitution protects Sanskrit for these and many other reasons. It is protecting what in Europe would be called a 'dead language' simply because of its antiquity. The language is officially recognized in a few states in India. There are exclusively Sanskrit speaking communities in India as well.

South Africa's and India's futures are intertwined. If the Suez crisis is not resolved, they will become the central points of the only maritime connection between Asia and Europe.