

# Gandhi

## a fight against discrimination



Alamy Images

### Gandhi and the Protest Against Passes (1869 - 1948)

In 1906, the Transvaal government introduced the Asiatic Law Amendment Ordinance. This required "Asiatics", eight years and older, to carry passes for which they had to register by giving thumb and fingerprints of both hands. The registration certificates had to be produced on demand and failure to do this would mean a fine of 100 pounds or three months in prison.

Gandhi was arrested for defying the registration process at the beginning of 1908. He then entered into negotiations with Jan Smuts. Gandhi said that he would ask all Asiatics to register voluntarily (then they wouldn't have to suffer the humiliation of being forced to do so), if parts of the Asiatic Registration Act were not passed into law. He took a big risk by offering to ensure that people registered voluntarily. Some people classified as "Asiatics" said that Gandhi was a traitor, and he was even assaulted.

Then, to make it worse, Smuts went against his promise. In July 1908, local municipalities started sending out notices that the Transvaal Asiatic Registration Act of 1908 would soon be implemented. The government said that those people who had already taken out registration certificates voluntarily would not be able to recall them. Thus, the decision was made to burn all the cards already in existence. People handed in their certificates to be burned at a meeting of about three thousand people near the Fordsburg Mosque on the 16th August 1908. Chinese representatives sat on the platform with the Indian Congress leaders, including Gandhi.

**Gandhi recuperating at the Doke home in Braamfontein after the near fatal attack** *Sunday Times*



## Reading Documents and Photographs

In this lesson plan, learners will be asked to extract information from a document, photographs and an extract from Gandhi's speech on the occasion of the burning of registration certificates in 1908. They will be able to explore the motives of the Transvaal Government in issuing passes to male Indians over the age of eight and the bitter feelings it stirred up among the Indian community. Learners will be introduced to Gandhi's political philosophy – *satyagraha* - translated as 'the force which is born of truth and love or non-violence'.


There is a great deal to say about MK Gandhi. This lesson plan focuses only on the protest against the Transvaal Asiatic Registration Act led by Gandhi in 1908.



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### Transvaal Asiatic Registration Certificate.

Name in full Toona Cassim  
 Race Indian Age 30 Height 5' 9 1/2 inches  
 Description more right forearm slight leg post marks

 Registrar of Asiatics.  
 Date of Issue 21<sup>st</sup> May 1908  
 Holder's Signature [Signature]

Name of Wife Alsa Residence Boksburg

**SONS and MALE WARDS under the age of 16 years.**

NAMES.	AGE.	RESIDENCE.	RELATIONSHIP TO GUARDIAN.
<u>Abulhai</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>India</u>	<u>son</u>
<u>Hussambhai</u>	<u>1 1/2</u>	<u>Boksburg</u>	<u>do</u>
<u>Abdul Hamid</u>	<u>4 1/2</u>	<u>Boksburg</u>	<u>do</u>

[Signatures]

Transvaal Asiatic Registration Certificate, UNISA Archives



Registration certificates go up in flame outside the mosque *Transvaal Weekly Illustrated*, 18 January 1908

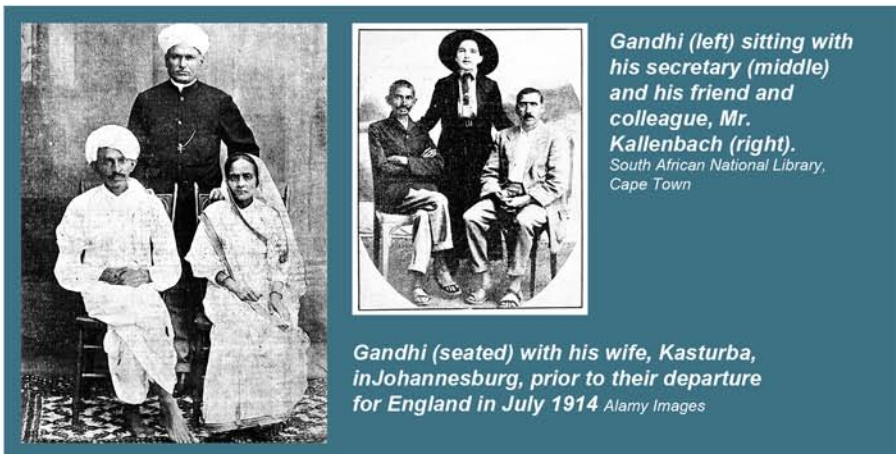


## Gandhi's Speech at the pass burning

"...unenfranchised though we are, unrepresented though we are in the Transvaal, it is open to us to clothe ourselves with an undying franchise, and this consists in recognizing our humanity, in recognizing that we are part and parcel of the great universal whole, that there is the Maker of us ruling over the destinies of mankind and that our trust should be in Him rather than in earthly kings, and if my countrymen recognize that position I say that no matter what legislation is passed over our heads, if that legislation is in conflict with our ideas of right and wrong, if it is in conflict with our conscience, if it is in conflict with our religion, then we can say we shall not submit to that legislation. We use no physical force, but we accept the sanction that the legislature provides, we accept the penalties that the legislature provides. I refuse to call this defiance, but I consider that it is a perfectly respectful attitude, for a man, for a human being who calls himself man.

But what is more, Mr Chamney (head of the Registration Department) has been less than a man in putting his signature before a justice of the Peace to an affidavit that was made on oath to the effect that he was present on the interview on the 3rd day of February and General Smuts never promised repeal of the Act. I say that that affidavit is untrue. He not only listened to the promise made by General Smuts as to the repeal of the Act, but he repeated that promise to me; he mentioned that promise to me, if once, twelve times, and each time he said that General Smuts was going to play the game, that he was going to repeal the Act."

*Originally published in the newspaper Indian Opinion 22 August, 1908. Republished in Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*



### Learner Activities

Study the Transvaal Asiatic Registration Certificate. How would you feel if you were Mr Jooma Cassim or his wife Assa?

- Study the speech that Gandhi made at the registration certificate burning. How do you think that the speech made people feel?
- How do you feel when you read Gandhi's speech?

**Answer these questions with a 'yes' or 'no':**

1. Did Gandhi believe that the same God created everybody?
2. Did Gandhi think that if the government's laws conflicted with religion or morality, people's first duty was to obey the government?
3. Did Gandhi believe in using physical force if the government was in the wrong?
4. Gandhi thought that Mr Chamney had not acted like a man. When Gandhi spoke of being a 'man' he also meant 'human'. What was Gandhi's idea of being a man?

### Other Ideas

Find out more about Gandhi's life in South Africa. If you live in, or visit Johannesburg, find out more about Gandhi in MuseumAfrica, visit Gandhi Square, see an exhibition on Gandhi at Constitution Hill and visit the Sunday Times memorial in Fordsburg.



**Gandhi with his wife, Kasturba** Alamy Images

### Criteria for Assessment:

- Learners will extract from the Certificate ideas about why carrying such a document was humiliating for the bearer.
- Learners will extract some of the important principles of Gandhi's political philosophy from his speech.

### Curriculum Link – Grades 10 & 11

LO 1, AS 3

LO 2, AS 2

Grade 11 Content link – How was segregation a foundation for apartheid?