



## **Islamic Impression on Gandhism**

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### **Abstract**

*Gandhism can be loosely described as the principles and contributions of Mahatma Gandhi to the philosophical thought. Gandhi swayed the entire nation with his principles and ideals and never hesitated to mention how he derived these ideas by getting influenced from different religions. The author here made an attempt to show how, some of his major ideals, got influenced by the major Islamic ideas. Firstly, Gandhi was more of a spiritually driven political leader which the nation has witnessed and it may be because of this reason he could win the hearts of the 'culturally fused' Indians. Gandhi not only believed in renunciation he rather practiced it in his ashram. The author, here, tried to relate Gandhi's form of renunciation with the Sufi form of renunciation. Secondly, even a lay person would know the importance of fasting in the religion of Islam and again the importance laid by Gandhi on fasting. That is why the author tried to figure out what Gandhi had to say about fasting and what the Islamic traditions or Hadith say about fasting. Thirdly, Gandhi's ideal of non-violence, here, is compared with one of the two parts of Iman i.e, faith. Therefore, it would be interesting to discover more such commonalities between Gandhism and Islam.*

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“Yes I am. I am also a Christian, a Muslim, a Buddhist & a Jew” (Sengupta) is the statement of none other than the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi was born into a Hindu family in 1869 and he remained a devout Hindu throughout his life. However, he was strongly influenced by the ideas from several other religions.

Gandhism, in a simple sense means an amalgam of Mahatma Gandhi's views, practices and ideas. It consists of ideas which Mahatma Gandhi presented before the world and his actions, which he described as his experiments with truth (Kumar). However Gandhi did not approve Gandhism. He explained that “there is no such thing as Gandhism and I don't want to leave any sect after me” (S. S. Gupta). It is quite clear from the above mentioned statement that Mahatma Gandhi did not want to create a monopoly and expected the world to change with time. But the kind of impact his ideas created then and the kind of importance it holds now deserves recognition and may be this is the reason why there remains volumes of works on Gandhism and the number keeps increasing day after day.

The objective of this paper is to locate the influence of Islam on Gandhi's major ideals or how far the ideals of Gandhi are in tune with the tenets of Islam. We would pick three major ideals practiced by Mahatma Gandhi which, according to the author of this paper, are the ideas which are to some extent influenced by the major attributes of Islam. The number of ideals which shares similarities perhaps be more than three but the author would limit those to only three.

Firstly, let us take up “Renunciation”, renunciation is the translation of the Sanskrit term ‘Aparagriha’ (non-grasping). When Gandhi rented a house for his family in Johannesburg and lived

there for two years from 1904-1906 he was influenced by the notion of aparagriha (R. M. Gandhi). Not only this, renunciation or aparagriha was one of the cardinal principles for the residents of Gandhi's ashram. I would now try to relate Gandhi's idea of renunciation with Islamic term of renunciation, the basic idea which the mystics in Islam adopted was the renunciation from world (Ritter). Arabic term for which is *Zuhd*. The first spirit of renunciation appealed to Gandhi was from Bhagwat Gita. I would like to, here, quote an extract from the 'Metaphysical implications of Gandhian Thought which goes as "the deepest impression Gandhi received from Arnold's translation, of Bhagwat Gita, was the necessity of absolute self- control". The researcher quotes again from the same source "The perfect renunciation is impossible without perfect observance of ahimsa in every shape & form (Chacko) . Now let us turn our focus towards the teachings of the early *sufis* then we would be convinced that the Islamic form of renunciation also created a momentum in Gandhi's perception of renunciation. But before getting into this discussion I would like to pinpoint that there exists numerous debates among the different religious scholars belonging to different sects of Islam regarding the concept of Sufism which mainly erupts from the difference in their ideologies based on *Usul-ul-fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence) and *Aqeedah* (matters of faith). There are different approaches to the methodology used in *fiqh* to derive Islamic Law from the Islamic sources. The four major Schools of thought to develop Islamic Jurisprudence are Sha'afi, Hanafi, Hanbali and Maliki named after their respective thinkers. There are two sources of Islamic Jurisprudence, firstly, the primary sources (Quran and Hadith) and secondly, the secondary sources like (*Ijma*, *Qiyas* etc). The conflict takes place when the question of acceptance and non-acceptance of the four schools of thought arises. *Aqeedah* means matters of faith, it is the core and base of all actions, it is a belief that is reflected in the deeds. The factors responsible for determining the *aqeedah* are broadly categorized as follows: i) tawhid or oneness of God ii) *Wahadat-ul-Wajood* or unity of being iii) unlimited reverence or veneration of Prophet SAW iv) *waseela* or supplication through a means v) *barzakh* or purgatory. But the point is that Indian people, be it Hindu or Muslim, or from any other sect, are syncretistic in nature. We cannot deny the role played by the great *sufi* saints who came to India and played a major part in bringing people from different races together not through force but through peace, love and tranquility. Dr. Lt. Col P.A Raju is of the opinion that it is from the *sufi* mystic Gandhi aspired for a pure heart and love of God (Raju). Now the researcher would put forward a tradition or hadith here, narrated by Sahl bin Sa'd as Saidi, "A man came to the messenger of Allah asked: 'O messenger of Allah! Guide me to a deed that, if I do it, Allah will love me and people will love me as well". Muhammad (SAW) said "have no desire (renunciation) for this world; Allah will love you; have no desire for what people possess (again, renunciation) people will love you (Ibn Majah 4102) (Zulfiqar). Dr. Zulfiqar says that *Zuhd* actually means that one should be contented with what it possesses and should not be greedy towards the luxuries and materialistic things. Dr. Zulfiqar further explains that involvement in worldly affairs and struggling for a lawful means of livelihood do not contradict *Zuhd*. According to the mystics the greed for luxuries and materialistic things takes one away from the true remembrance of Allah (SWT). If we combine the practicality of the Hadith narrated above and the flavor of mysticism regarding *Zuhd* then Gandhi's idea of renunciation highly reflects both. Gandhi's was highly influenced by *Isha Upanishads* and Gita. The first verse of *Isha Upanishads* (Vedas) states:

*Isha basyamidang sarbang yat kinch jagatyang jagat  
Tena taktena bhunjita ma gridha kasyashbhid dhanam* (Arabinda)

Gandhi, according to Arabinda Poddar, accepted this verse as ultimate truth. The gist of the above narrated verse is that all tangible material in this world has been created by God and there

should not be any greed for others wealth. Gandhi ideas tuned by the verse of Isha Upanishad appears in a slightly different mood, Gandhi considered the worldly duties and responsibilities as fundamental which must go parallel with the renunciation of desires.

The second practical ideal of Gandhi which we will be taking into consideration would be 'fasting'. Fasting in Homer A Jack edited "Wit & Wisdom of Gandhi" authored by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Gandhi views that "a calm reflection will show that all sins like lying, cheating, stealing are ultimately due to our subjection of palate. He who is able to control the palate will easily be able to control the other senses" and "a 'full' meal is a crime against God and man—the latter because the full-mealers deprive their neighbours of their portion..... it dawns upon some of us that food is made not to enjoy but to sustain body as our slave.....Hence the necessity for complete fast at intervals and partial fasts forever" and again an extract from the same source "for me there is nothing more cleansing as a fast .A fast undertaken for fuller self-expression for attainment of the spirits' supremacy over the flesh, is a most powerful factor in one's evolution". Our next step would be to co relate the ideas of Gandhi on fasting and eating less with the Islam's attitude towards fasting. The readers must be well aware of the importance of fasting in Islam; it is one of the five pillars of Islam. Fasting in the month of Ramadan is a 'compulsory' duty on every Muslim. There is again supererogatory or nafil fasting which are considered as highly rewarding they are; six days in the month of Shawaal ( month after Ramadan), nine days in the month of Hajj, fasting in the month of Muharram, bright days in every month i.e, 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> days of every Islamic month etc (Days in which supererogatory fasting is recommended). Now Gandhi spoke of the necessity for complete fast at intervals and Islam cites the best example in this regard. The holy Prophet in a number of authentic Hadith recommended his people to eat moderate amount of food. I would cite only one tradition in this connection, "No man fills a vessel worse than his stomach. A few mouthfuls that would suffice to keep his back upright is enough for a man. But if he must eat more than he should fill one-third (of his stomach) with food, one third with drink and one third for easy breathing (Ibn Majah and other books of Hadith) (Qadri).

Truly there are many similarities between how Gandhi portrayed his ideas on fasting and eating and the importance that is laid on fasting and eating less in Islam. Gandhi has used fasting as a weapon during Satyagraha and in many other events and it is because of that "We, the people of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a SOVEREIGN Socialist Secular Democratic Republic..."

Last but not the least I am taking up Gandhi's one of the most important ideal of Non-violence or Ahimsa. I know the readers must be getting curious that how can the author relate the principle of non-violence that too with Islam since post 9/11 terrorism and Islam are used synonymously. Gandhi paid great importance to self-examination and self-criticisms; he was a rare politician who did not abstain from criticizing the oppressive aspect of Hindu religion on its caste system (Prabhu). William Borman writes about Gandhi in his book entitled 'Gandhi & Non Violence' that "He considers self-examination the key stone of self-purification, since recognizing the triviality of all passing material interests constitutes more than half the moral battle" (Borman). The reader can easily depict the commonality between what Islam prescribed 1400 years ago and how Mahatma Gandhi developed his ideas based on those prescriptions. Gandhi speaks about self-control and self-purification in this context lets us here refer to Harris Zafar's 'Demystifying Islam', Zafar writes in Quran and Hadith the greatest *Jihad* is defined as a process of striving or struggling within one's own self to improve one's character. It is the effort of purifying oneself by striving, struggling or

fighting against one's evil tendencies and vices and curbing any inclination or temptation toward immoral or sinful behavior"

Mahatma Gandhi states "Non Violence cannot be preached it has to be practiced." (M. Gandhi) It is quite clear by now that the third and the last idea taken into consideration is non-violence. What does non-violence imply in Gandhi's context? It is the use of "peaceful means", not force, to bring about political or social change, in some way or the other the definition is very close to the meaning of "patience" and it is because of Gandhi's patient application of non-violence we get to smell the air of freedom. The Arabic word for patience or endurance is 'sabr' which is characterized as being one of the two parts of faith or 'Iman' the other being 'shukr' or thankfulness. Non Violence according to Gandhi is impossible with self-purification. We have already mentioned the importance of self-purification in Islam.

**Conclusion:** Be it the struggle with one's own self and to have control over one's nerves i.e., to practice *jihad* or be it going without food for self-purification i.e, religious fasts (one of the five pillars of Islam) or be it detachment from the worldly luxuries i.e, mysticism or *Sufism* or be it patience i.e., *sabr* Mahatma Gandhi practiced all.

The intention of this article is to convey here that neither Hinduism preaches us to follow staunch *Hindutva* forces nor Islam makes us fundamental radicalists. Religions when driven by political forces tend to create misconceptions, misconceptions that can shake the pillars of humanity and turn human beings into lowly beasts. No religion preaches enmity with fellow beings, even the animals don't attack their own race then why humans do that? The father of the nation drew his principles from Christianity, Buddhism, Islam etc. then why can we?

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