



Comparing Gandhi's Concept of Satyagraha with that of Jihad in Islam

Fatemeh Mohammadi¹

1. Assistant Professor of Sociology, Allameh Tabatabaee University, Tehran, Iran
(Fatemehmohammadi@atu.ac.ir)

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Abstract

This paper compares Islamic teachings regarding Jihad with Gandhi's Satyagraha or non-violent resistance. Abdul Ghaffar Khan, one of Gandhi's Muslim followers, has argued that not only was Islam compatible with non-violent methods, but that Prophet Muhammad had taught his followers non-violent resistance hundreds of years earlier than Gandhi had. Scholars such as Eknath Easwaran have also reiterated this argument (Easwaran, 1999, 34). This paper on the other hand argues that Islamic teachings regarding non-violence are more complicated than what Khan proclaimed. The verses of the Quran regarding Jihad or struggle can be divided between the revelations in Mecca, during the first thirteen years of the Prophet's campaign, and the final ten years of his life, after he and his followers immigrated to the city of Medina. In the first thirteen years, Prophet Muhammad preached non-violent resistance even though Muslims were under severe pressure and prosecution. During this period Islamic teaching are quite compatible with Gandhi's Satyagraha. However, after the new Muslim community immigrated to Medina and formed an Islamic government it came under the threat of annihilation by a foreign invading army, at which time Islam and its Prophet permitted defensive wars, unlike Gandhi's teachings and Khan's assertions. The paper concludes that Ahimsa may work only in the route towards power, whereas when the position of power achieved and an independent political community and its leadership formed, according to Islam, means of legitimate and justified violence could not be avoided altogether.

Keywords: Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Ahimsa, Gandhi, Islam, Nonviolent resistance, Prophet Mohammad

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1. Introduction

The word violence is a controversial subject in Islam in the eyes of many. Some consider Islam as a religion of violence while others call it a religion of peace and justice. Both sides use the verses of the Quran and the *Sirah* (way of life) of the Prophet Muhammad to justify their own perspectives. Both peace-loving Muslims, such as Abdul Ghaffar Khan, and violent Muslim groups such as the ISIS and Taliban argue that they are applying the Quran and the *Sirah* to their everyday lives (Kibble, 2016, p. 138). This paper examines Islam's compatibility with Gandhi's non-violent resistance or Satyagraha through an investigation of the nonviolent methods of Abdul Ghaffar Khan, one of Gandhi's Muslim associates. Abdul Ghaffar Khan was born in Utmanzai in Peshawar, one of the most violent places in British India. In one of Khan's biographies, it is explained that his life was dedicated to the social reform of Pashtun people. Khan created a social movement named Khudai Khidmatgar (Servants of God) from 1930-47 (Gandhi, 2017, p. 43). This social movement's doctrine was based on no harm and non-violence. He was named The Frontier Gandhi: "If our world wants to picture non-violent defiance, or inter-faith partnership, ... or a commitment to the rights of the vulnerable, it cannot do much better than study these two men together: Ghaffar Khan and, older by 21 years, Mohandas Gandhi, brothers in spirit, each armed with the swords of conscience and courage" (Gandhi, 2017, p. 67). He claimed that his nonviolent movement was derived from the teachings of the Quran and the life of Prophet Muhammad. Prophet Muhammad is a role model for millions of Muslims around the globe and his *Sirah* (way of life) is as important as the Quran for many Muslims. This means that Muslims try to replicate his words and actions in today's society (Sertkaya & Keskin, 2020, p. 12). To

assess this, the paper examines some of the Quran's controversial verses regarding Jihad, arguing in the process that Islam permits the use of violence in certain circumstances, unlike Abdul Ghaffar Khan's assertion. This is achieved by studying related Quranic verses alongside the context in which they were revealed. Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad's *sirah* and saying in regards to violence and non-violence will be investigated to better understand the position of Islam regarding *Jihad*. It should be mentioned that the *Sirah* of the Prophet, as well as the verses of the Quran, need scholarly interpretation, otherwise his acts and words could easily be misunderstood and misused.

2. Literature Review

There is a strong body of literature on Gandhi's philosophical viewpoints and his approach to nonviolent resistance. One such instance is *Gandhi on Non-Violence* edited by Thomas Merton (2012), which provides Gandhi's viewpoints on the principles of non-violence, the spiritual dimensions of non-violence, as well as the political scope and the "purity" of such a struggle. The book has gathered Gandhi's approach to nonviolence from various periods of his life. Another important book is *the Bhagavad Gita According to Gandhi*, in which Gandhi (2009) provides his translation and interpretation of the Gita. He draws upon his own extraordinary life experience to describe how the Gita is "the gospel of selfless action" in the service to God. This devotion and compassion promoted by Gandhi plays a central role in his introduction of the concept of Satyagraha. Based on Hindu philosophy, the Gita played an important role in Gandhi's understanding of the world and the need for nonviolent resistance.

On the other hand, there is much smaller literature regarding the compatibility of Islam with Gandhi's nonviolence. Perhaps the most prominent book in this category is *Nonviolent Soldier of Islam: Badshah Khan: A Man to Match His Mountains* by Eknath Easwaran (1999). The book argues that within the Pathan community where vengeance was a tradition and a code of honor, Abdul Ghafar Khan practiced nonviolence as a way of life. The book, which has been translated and reprinted in various countries, argues that Khan, as an Islamic practitioner of pacifism demonstrated that Islam was deeply compatible with nonviolence. This is in contrast to this article, which argues that Islamic viewpoints regarding nonviolence are compatible with Gandhi's approach only in certain circumstances and conditions.

In *Gandhi and Bin Laden: Religion at the Extremes* James Rowell (2009) examines the views of Gandhi, Osama bin Laden, and Abdul Ghaffar Khan and argues that Satyagraha is the diametrical opposite of the Islamic concept of Jihad. Rowell argues that Jihad, as a perverted interpretation of Islam, connotes terrorism and suicide bombing, leading to death, destruction, and instability in the world. In contrast, for people who practice Satyagraha, "truth and justice seem to shine from their soul and their employment of soul force sets them apart." While Rowell admits that current understandings of Jihad are not what Islam intended and points out that Gandhi had nonviolent Muslim allies, he does not provide a more accurate understanding of Islam's view regarding violence and non-violence.

In *Islam and Violence in the Modern Era* Beverley Milton-Edwards (2006) argues that after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, a new interpretation of modernity that insists on western security interests and the arguments for democratic protectionism have emerged,

leading to the War on Terror in defense of Western modernity. Edwards argues that the War on Terror is understood as a declaration of war against Muslim communities and their faith. According to Edwards, it has been the attack of this Western version of modernity on Islam that has radicalized it and in turn, led to a violent interpretation of Jihad. Edwards' book provides an interesting examination of how violence by Muslims has to be understood according to the post-9/11 context; however, it provides no analysis of how Islam views violence and non-violence.

3. Definition of Nonviolent Resistance

Nonviolence is a form of peaceful resistance action or technique and therefore should not be considered as inaction or "passive" resistance. According to Gene Sharp, nonviolent action is a technique in which people can address conflict, including threats to their security, without using violence. It is not an attempt to ignore or to avoid conflict. Nonviolence means bringing social and political change through peaceful means. Gene Sharp divides nonviolent action into three categories, nonviolent protest and persuasion, noncooperation, and nonviolent intervention (Sharp, 1973, p. 117). The first category includes methods such as demonstrations, vigils, pickets, protest meetings, using posters, street theater, and paintings. Noncooperation, which is the most common form of nonviolent action, includes strikes, boycotts, tax resistance (economic), and boycotts of legislative bodies and elections (political). Acts of civil disobedience are also included under political boycott (Sharp, 1973, p. 315). The third category, nonviolent intervention, divides into two groups of methods which are *disruptive* and *creative*. Disruptive methods include nonviolent

blockades, fasting, seeking imprisonment, while creative methods involve establishing alternative political, economic, and social institutions such as ethical investment groups, alternative schools, and parallel media or even parallel “governments” (Sharp, 1973, p. 357). Marcie Smith argues that Sharp’s definition of nonviolence provides a behavioral definition, lacking any moral and ethical elements (Smith, 2019, p. 65). Daniel Ott on the other hand argues that nonviolence is a method in which conflict can be addressed and prevented without the use of violence and coercion. This definition is an active engagement that addresses imbalances of power (Ott, 2014, p. 10). Arguably, Mahatma Gandhi’s explanation of the term presented in the next section provides the most complete and comprehensive definition.

4. Gandhi’s Nonviolent Resistance

In the modern period, Mahatma Gandhi is perhaps the most notable figure who theorized nonviolent resistance and practiced it in real life. Gandhi has arguably influenced Indian religions, similar to Jesus Christ’s teachings in the Gospel of Mathew. Gandhi excludes violence due to various reasons. He sees nonviolence as a moral ideology, in which violence is equal to evil; this ideology can be applied universally to all aspects of life, and connect non-violence with Truth. Gandhi was heavily influenced by the concept of Ahimsa. The word Ahimsa (Sanskrit: *ahiṃsā*, Pāli: *avihiṃsā*) means 'not to injure' and 'compassion'. Joan Bondurant, in her book titled *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict Gandhi*, argues that the concept of Ahimsa is one of the core notions (Mahabharata: *ahimsa param dharma*) in the three religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism and therefore it is “known in every village in India” (Bondurant, 1958, p. 23). Mahabharata

means “non-violence is the ultimate duty” and condemns harm and cruelty. This concept is related to the idea of freedom from hatred, anger, and hostility in words, deeds, and thoughts. Gandhi himself elaborates ahimsa into two positive and negative forms. He explains, “In its negative form it means not injuring any living being whether by body or mind...It requires deliberate self-suffering, not a deliberate injuring of the supposed wrongdoer...In its positive form, ahimsa means the largest love, the greatest charity... This active ahimsa necessarily includes truth and fearlessness” (Bondurant, 1958, p. 55).

Gandhi explained that “we have to live a life of Ahimsa amid a world of Himsa, and that is possible only if we cling to truth. That is how I deduce Ahimsa from the truth. Out of truth emanate love, tenderness, humility. A votary of truth has to be humble as the dust” (Gandhi, 1968, p. 127). Gandhi's non-violent ideal man, *Sthitaprajna*, is based on the model of the Bhagavad Gita. In fact, the Bhagavad Gita is the foremost text Gandhi used for the development of his nonviolent method. Gandhi's nonviolent method aims at the purification and empowerment of the will through non-retaliation and constructive work. In the political realm, non-violence involves the ways to bring about the good of all through corporate activity, this is known as *Sarvodaya*.

The ‘good of all,’ preached by Gandhi is in contrast to the concept of ‘the greatest good for the greatest number’; therefore, instead of the principle of utility, Gandhi is replacing the principle of *Sarvodaya* as a moral criterion. As a result, violent and non-violent methods and the justifications used for their use are assessed based on these two principles (Borman, 1986, p. 14).

Satyagraha means ‘holding to Truth.’ Gandhi himself translates

it as a “soul-force,” explaining that “it is soul force, the power of Godhead within us and we become Godlike to the extent we realize nonviolence” (Gandhi, 2008, p. 50). Gandhi used the above concepts to formulate his Satyagraha struggle, which entails a resolute but nonviolent resistance to evil. Satyagraha became the main focus of the Indian struggle against the British imperialism (Britannica, 2021). Gandhi believes that Satyagraha can be used to achieve not only political reforms, but also moral and social ones. The central theme to Satyagraha, as the name implies, is Truth, which Gandhi connects to God, explaining:

This God whom we seek to realize is Truth. Or to put it another way, Truth is God. This Truth is not merely the Truth we are expected to speak. It is that which alone is, which constitutes the stuff of which all things are made, which subsists by virtue of its own power, which is not supported by anything else but supports everything that exists. Truth alone is eternal, everything else is momentary (Borman, 1986, p. 22)

Gandhi sees his nonviolent action as a means toward the goal of Truth. When it came to politics, he believed that this approach has three main elements: personal nonviolence as a way of life, constructive work to create a new society, and finally nonviolent resistance (Burrowes, 1996, p. 102). Gandhi stressed that nonviolence first and foremost began in the individual with an effort to overcome anger and fear. Second, the individual must not be violent in thought, word, or deed in regards to the ‘enemy’. The third characteristics are the capacity of self-suffering; this is one of the central themes of Satyagraha, which entails nonviolence in reaction to the violence and suffering inflicted by others (Gandhi, 2008, pp. 79-80). It will be discussed in this paper that this notion was very much practiced by Prophet Muhammad and his followers

when they were living in the city of Mecca during the first part of the Prophet's life, although such an approach was changed later on. In fact, the themes of the verses in the Quran that are revealed in Mecca are different from the ones in Medina, which indicates the different approach of Islam with regards to the concept of Jihad.

Gandhi believes that non-violence will lead to the conversion of others. This is very similar to one of the directives of Prophet Muhammad, which says that in order to make other people abandon their bad actions willingly, you must show them kindness. Ali Ibn-Abitaleb the first Imam of Shia Islam also says, "make your enemies shameful by being kind to them" (Abutalib, 1996).

In Gandhi's thought, nonviolent resistance is a choice made by the individual, not because it is mandatory due to the lack of ability to respond with violence, but rather it is a decision rooted in the lack of fear of death (Gandhi, 2008, p. 198). This viewpoint is very similar to the Islamic idea of martyrdom, about which Shariati, a famous Iranian intellectual and Sociologist, depicts as "the dying of a human being that guarantees the life of a nation. His *Shahadat* (Martyrdom) is a means whereby faith can remain and provide that truth that is being denied. It also reveals the existence of values which are destroyed and forgotten and it's not a death imposed on him" (Shariati, 1972). Thus, the martyr by sacrificing his or her own life, lights the path towards the truth and shames the oppressor.

Another characteristic of a Satyagrahi is being brave; instead of fearing others, one should only fear God. Gandhi explains that a "nation is great which rests its head upon death as its pillow" (Gandhi, 2008, p. 315). Interestingly, this concept of Gandhi is again very similar to one of Islam's fundamental tenets called

Tavakol, which is to understand that everything in the world is in the hands of God and as such we must put our hopes and faith only in him, rather than become subservient and subjects to other human beings.

Moreover, Gandhi was a practitioner of non-violence in actual life. He emphasized noncooperation in both economy and politics, via the use of strikes, boycotts (both economical and elections), and nonpayment of tax. Gandhi also called for fasting which is a form of self-suffering. Another example of a disruptive nonviolent intervention that was used by him was seeking imprisonment (Gandhi, 2008, pp. 319-320). When Gandhi wants to describe how a person who seeks to practice Satyagraha is supposed to be, he mentions that when officers want to arrest you, you should not resist but instead welcome prison. He also says that by practicing nonviolence the prison becomes a form of heaven, “they can send us to prison and we will live there as in a paradise” (Gandhi, 2008, p. 341).

Gandhi also observed creative nonviolence by creating a parallel media to that of the British Empire. He published a newspaper and named it Indian Opinion, which was published in South Africa. Through it, he explained his ideas of nonviolent resistance. In addition, Gandhi, as well as Abdul Ghaffar Khan who will be introduced later in this paper, established alternative schools to take away Indian children from the influences of the British. Gandhi also created separate or alternative communities to that of the larger society, among which were ‘Tolstoy farm’ and ‘Phoenix settlement’ in South Africa. His creative farms were so independent of the authorities that they could be seen as small but separate governments alongside that of the dominant establishment.

To understand whether Islam is compatible with Gandhi’s

nonviolent resistance, this essay shall look at a devout Muslim named Abdul Ghaffar Khan, one of Gandhi's close associates, who despite living in one of the most violent places on earth, fully devoted himself to Gandhi's Satyagraha.

5. Abdul Ghaffar Khan: A Muslim Practitioner of Satyagraha

Abdul Ghaffar Khan (1890-1988) was born in Utmanzai in the Peshawar Valley of British India. His father Behram Khan was a landowner in the area commonly referred to as Hashtnaggar. He was educated at British schools in India and even considered joining the British military. However after seeing the attitude of a British officer, he decided to instead establish an independent school to counter British control over India.

Khan is considered as one of the foremost Muslim associates of Gandhi, to the extent that people named him as the Frontier Gandhi or Islamic Gandhi. He was, as he explained, influenced both by Prophet Muhammad and Gandhi for his nonviolent resistance (Rowell, 2009, pp. 591-592). He truly, as Gandhi talks about him, believed in nonviolence in his heart and it was not just "lip service". Being a landlord, Abdul Ghaffar Khan started to establish schools in the region occupied by the Pathans.

Abdul Ghaffar Khan is a name given to him by the Pathans, after all, he did for them. Pathans or Pukhtuns are the people living in the southern part of Afghanistan and northern parts of Pakistan, divided by the British imposed Durand Line of 1893 (Rowell, 2009, p. 590). Two of the main arts of the Pathan way of life was the know-how of killing and dying (Easwaran, 1999, p. 99). Abdul Ghaffar Khan did not see this violence as bloodlust but rather as

rooted in ignorance and lack of education. He was the founder of the Khudai Khidmatgars (which emerged in 1929) and means “Servants of God,” which was a nonviolent army. Any Pathan could join this army if he pledged to serve the people of God through nonviolence, to forgive those who treat them badly, and to live a simple life. They were supposed to work on their manners and have good behavior as well as devote two hours of their day to social work (Easwaran, 1999, p. 112).

Abdul Ghaffar Khan mentions that he was ignorant of nonviolence when he was young and was not born into it, but rather learned and practiced it later on in life, during which he also learned to comprehend the Quran. He explains that by reading and understanding Prophet Muhammad’s suffering, dedication, and patience in Mecca to guide people and comparing it to Gandhi’s struggle against the British Raj, he realized the importance of nonviolence more than ever (Easwaran, 1999, p. 141). He quotes one of the Prophet’s Hadith that says, “a Muslim never hurts anyone by word or deeds, but works for the benefit and happiness of God’s creatures. Belief in God is to love one’s fellowmen.”

The ‘Frontier Gandhi’ was a modern Muslim who practiced nonviolent resistance. He believed that it was not a strange phenomenon for a Pathan to practice nonviolence because the Prophet did it 1400 years ago. Gandhi refers to Khan by saying that he learned his politics from his religion (Easwaran, 1999, p. 143). Abdul Ghaffar Khan mentions the verse in the Quran that Prophet Muhammad is a mercy to humankind (The Quran, Al-Anbiya, verse 107). Prophet Muhammad is understood as a role model that established a pluralistic society, in which differences are not just tolerated, but even respected (Yildirim, 2009, p. 440).

The Frontier Gandhi took the Prophet's life in Mecca as a model

for his nonviolent resistance. According to Haji Sarfaraz Nazim, a close friend of Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his secretary until his death, "When Badshah [Abdul Ghaffar] Khan was at a loss for a suitable strategy, inspiration came to him from the example of the Prophet's exile in Medina, and he decided upon a complete lack of violence." Khan himself said in one of his public meetings that "It is wrong to assume that Gandhi was the first to set foot on a nonviolent campaign in order to attain *swaraj* (self-rule). About 1400 years ago, the Prophet of Arabia had recourse to nonviolence." Khan said to Pathans that "I am going to give you such a weapon that the police and the army will not be able to stand against it. It is the weapon of the Prophet, but you are not aware of it. That weapon is patience and righteousness. No power on earth can stand against it" (Gandhi, 2017, p. 97).

As Khan explains to Gandhi, only one in one hundred thousand understands the true meaning of Islam (Easwaran, 1999, p. 145). Khan's Islam was a universal calling to faith, devotion, and nonviolence. He truly submitted his will to the will of God as he himself says, "What pleases God pleases me" (Gandhi, 2008, p. 22). Abdul Ghaffar Khan made it clear that, in the midst of the brutal actions being taken by the authorities against the Khudai Khidmatgars, death was a real possibility. He stressed, however, that it would be a noble death in a great cause. The essence of martyrdom, however, is to commit oneself to death as an act of witness to injustice and the subversion of truth, especially when there is no way to fight (Gandhi, 2008, p. 24). Ali Shariati, a famous Iranian intellectual and sociologist explains, "The martyr's death is not a means but is a goal itself. It is originality. It is completion... it is the only reason for existence." As a result, unlike in a military jihad, the choice was not between death and

victory but rather as Abdul Ghaffar Khan puts it for his nonviolent army, the opportunity of glorious sacrifice and martyrdom. He says “If you plant a slap after having been provoked by a slap, then what is the difference between the followers of the Quran and the evildoer?” (Gandhi, 2008, p. 26).

One of the verses of the Quran that promotes nonviolent resistance, which is used by Khan, is a verse regarding the time when Cain wants to kill his brother Abel. According to the Quran, Abel tells his brother that if you kill me “it’s not in my desire to stretch my hand towards you because I fear God” (The Quran, Al-Ma’ida, verse 28). This is a clear example in which fear of God prevents using violence for revenge. This is similar to Gandhi’s position explained earlier which stresses, “Truth and non-violence are not possible without a living belief in God, meaning a self-existent, all-knowing, living force which inheres in every other force known to the world and which depends on none, and which will live when all other forces may conceivably perish or cease to act” (Gandhi, 1948, p. 112).

Moreover, another aspect of nonviolence, which, according to Abdul Ghaffar Khan is crucial, is *sawm* (fasting), which, according to Islam, is the practice of patience. When he was once asked to explain his understanding of nonviolence, Khan responded with just one word: “Patience!” He saw Islam in terms of selfless love and service. “It is my inmost conviction that Islam is *amal, yakeen, muhabat*, selfless service, faith and love” (Gandhi, 1948, p. 114).

Abdul Ghaffar explains this as follows, “The Quran teaches jihad, which in its real sense means to struggle for the welfare and advancement of its followers” (Khan, 1969). And he continues “They took the external ‘lesser jihad’ against injustices of the colonial rulers, but they had first to undergo their internal ‘greater

jihad' to develop the necessary qualities of self-restraint and patience." This is why Khan used the greater jihad to prepare for and achieve the lesser jihad (Banerjee, 2001, p. 210).

The Nonviolent practice that Khan preached among the Pathans, as explained by himself, is built on the virtues of patience and self-restraint (Banerjee, 2001, p. 211). Khan once told Gandhi of a discussion he had with a Punjabi Muslim who did not see the nonviolent core of Islam. "I cited chapter and verse from the Quran to show the great emphasis that Islam had laid on peace, which is its coping stone," Khan said. "I also showed to him how the greatest figures in Islamic history were known more for their forbearance and self-restraint than for their fierceness. The reply rendered him speechless".

As discussed in this essay, there are many Quranic verses and Hadiths that support nonviolent resistance and Abdul Ghaffar Khan rightly adopted them to give a religious justification for his nonviolent means. While it is true that Islam preaches nonviolence and Prophet Muhammad adopted it for many years in Mecca, Islam undeniably also permits the use of violence in certain circumstances, as revealed in some Quranic verses as well as the fact that Prophet Muhammad himself took part in several major wars such as Badr, Uhud and al- Khandaq during the period when he led the Ummah in the city of Medina. The next section will examine this seeming contradiction.

6. Does Islam Preach Non-Violent Resistance?

The word *Islam* means peace, however unfortunately the Western world considers Islam as one of the most violent religions, even

though violence takes place in every corner of the world involving many religions from Christianity to Hinduism. As Edward Said explains, “For the right, Islam represents barbarism; for the left, medieval theocracy; for the center, a kind of distasteful exoticism. In all camps, however, there is agreement that even though little enough is known about the Islamic world there is not much to be approved of there” (Said, 1981, p. xv).

In order to know what Islam’s idea about nonviolence is, one must first look at the definition of violence. There are many different definitions for the word violence in various dictionaries, such as ‘swift and intense force’, ‘rough or injurious physical force or action’, ‘unjust or unwarranted exertion of force especially against the rights of others, ‘rough or immediate vehemence’ and finally ‘injury resulting from the distortion of meaning or fact’. If violence is considered as a force, Islam is not completely opposed to its use, but rather says that this force has to be controlled and confined by divine law, which is known as the *Al-Sharia*. Force should be used to create harmony and it is forbidden to be used for personal reasons or for the sake of a sectarian group based on personal desires (Nasr, 1987, p. 9). Islam believes that natural, social and psychological forces do exist and Islam aims to limit them through *sharia* laws (Nasr, 1987, p. 8). Islam rejects the use of violence unless under exceptional and extreme circumstances and even then, with restrictions and limitations and in the service of society and justice. This force is called *jihad* in Islam. The word Jihad literally means effort and struggle. There are two types of jihad, Akbar (greater) and Asghar (lesser). The first and more important one is to try to gain self-control or self-realization, which means to control your thoughts, speeches, and actions. The second one means to act against injustice, namely to fight on the side of the

oppressed and against the oppressor. Justice is a central component of Islam, as Shariati puts it "Justice is not simply a religious principle but the spirit that governs all aspects of Islam, and is considered the very objective for which all the Prophets were sent" (Shariati, 1972, p. 36).

A verse in the Quran explains Islam's concept of *Jihad* and outlines the cases in which force is permitted:

And why should ye not fight in the cause of Allah

And of those who, being weak are ill-treated (and oppressed)? Men, women, and children, whose cry is "Our Lord!

Rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors; And raise for us from Thee One who will protect;

And raise for us from Thee One who will help!" (Holy Quran, Al-Nisa, verse 75).

In other words, jihad means to stand up to oppression and fight on behalf of the oppressed (regardless of who is oppressed and who is the oppressor) (Satha-Anand, 1989, p. 15). Therefore, jihad can be differentiated by direction (inner and outer) and by method (force as well as nonviolence). In Islam, injustice can be fought both through force, and through non-violent means. Furthermore, in Islam in order to fight the oppressor, one has to first fight the inner injustices (Jihad Akbar), so that the fight for justice would not become an excuse to reach an individual and group's non-moral objectives. This corresponds to what Gandhi teaches in his Satyagraha, in which the individual comes first. If someone has hatred in his heart or mind, he or she cannot overcome injustice and fight against the oppressor. Islam says that you cannot use

force against oppressors with hatred inside your heart, otherwise the purpose of this fighting would be personal rather than divine/moral. One example of this was in the war of *Khandagh*, in which Prophet Muhammad and the residents of Medina were defending their city against a much larger army that was trying to invade it. There is a central battle in this war, in which Ali-ibn-Abitaleb the son-in-law of the Prophet fought against Omar-Abdovad, one of Arabia's most famous warriors. During the battle, after Ali was successful in beating Abdovad to the ground, Ali suddenly stopped the fight and withdrew. Later on, when he was asked why he did not finish the battle, Ali said that Omar spat on his face, and as a result, he became angry, and since he was fighting for God and did not want to fight for his desires and fits of anger, he thus withdrew from the battle (Jafarian, 1388 [2009 A.D.], p. 147).

Another point that should be mentioned is that the Quran first talks about keeping your promise and then the verses of Jihad come, meaning that you should achieve Jihad Akbar before you can practice Jihad Asghar. In Islamic perspective, as declared by Abdul Ghaffar Khan, human beings were all united, but they were separated from each other through non-moral desires.

- Mankind was but one nation but differed (later). Had it not Been for a Word
- That went forth before
- From thy Lord, their differences Would have been settled Between them (Holy Quran, Yunus, verse 19).

By understanding the above verse, one understands the meaning of this highly important verse too:

- And if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved
- The life of the whole people (the entire humanity) (Holy Quran, Al-Ma'ida, verse 32).

According to the above explanations, the question of whether Islam promotes or opposes the body-force that Gandhi is against is a complicated question that needs further research by Islamic scholars. To find the answer to the above question, we should 1) divide the life of Prophet Muhammad whose actions are to be followed by all Muslims into two categories; the first thirteen years of his preaching in the city of Mecca and the next ten years in the city of Medina, and 2) look at the verses of Quran revealed during these two periods. In the first period in Mecca, the Prophet and his followers were under immense pressure and oppression by the powerful groups of the city. Masters tortured slaves who had converted to Islam using extremely violent methods. The Prophet's response to this was to ask his followers to be patient and not to respond via violence. Patience is a vital necessity for nonviolent action. This is explained in Abdul Ghaffar Khan's speech, "When the Muslims in Mecca were oppressed and helpless and poor like us, the infidels of Mecca were resorting to various sorts of tyrannies over them. The Muslims came to the Holy Prophet and asked him how they would be able to combat infidels. The Holy Prophet told them that he would show them such a thing that no power on earth would be able to stand against it. The thing is patience and righteousness!" (Jafarian, 1388 [2009 A.D.], p. 149). Although it should be mentioned that in Mecca in many occasions Prophet Muhammad had the power and opportunity to use violence and using violence was acceptable in that society but he refused and instead he preferred a gentle and forgiving approach. A famous example was prophet's behavior towards a man named Ibn Salul

who offended him and was rude to the Prophet in many occasions. Prophet Muhammad never got into an argument with him and even prayed at Ibn Salul's funeral. It should be noted that when Prophet Muhammad was in Medina, he was the commander and leader of the city and with the power that he had it was easy to crush his opponents but peace was his priority (Sertkaya & Keskin, 2020, p. 3).

In Medina, however, the verses relating to Jihad Akbar and Jihad Asghar were revealed permitting certain forms of force. Many who are critical of Islam emphasize that Prophet Muhammad and the Muslim community did engage in warfare and this is, in fact, true. However, it should also be noted, that this was after many years of persecution and when the Muslims were forced to leave their homes and had their property taken from them. In Islam, there is a strong emphasis on justice and rejection of oppression; thus, there are times where self-defensive warfare is necessary. What the verses in the Qur'an about warfare do is to provide limitations on how warfare should be carried out. But this does not preclude the possibility and desire for non-violent resistance (Reem, 2011). This dual approach of Islam should be considered when the Quran talks about Jihad. When a verse from the Quran is being discussed it is vital to examine the situation in which it was revealed and how the Prophet explained its meaning, otherwise, it might lead to misinterpretation, especially regarding verse talking about Jihad. For example, a very famous verse stress:

Not equal are those believers who sit (at home) and receive no hurt, and those who Jihad (strive and struggle) in the cause of Allah with their belongings and their bodies. Allah hath granted a grade higher to those who strive and struggle with their goods and persons than to those who sit (at home). Unto all (in Faith) Hath Allah promised

good: But those who strive Hath He distinguished above those who sit (at home) by a special reward (Holy Quran, Al-Nisa, verse 95).

Verses such as the above can be used to legitimize the use of force in Islam, however in order to explain these verses one must know and consider the context in which the verse was revealed. For example, this verse was revealed when a group of Muslims from Mecca had to flee their hometown toward the city of Medina in order to avoid prosecution by non-Muslims, whereas others decided to stay in Mecca and instead renounce or conceal their faith. This verse explains that God differentiates between those who lost all their earthly belongings and their livelihoods as a price for their faith with those who decided to "sit at home". Thus, the verse is in fact talking about non-violent resistance or "struggle" and not the use of violence. Interestingly enough, however, the word struggle has been replaced with the word "fight" in many Western translations, making the verse sound as if God regards those who fight violently with higher regard than those who do not fight, whereas in fact, the context of the verse reveals that the word *Jihad* used in this verse has no violent connotation. Islamic scholars explain that each verse of the Quran has to be understood through the other verses of the holy book as well as via the sayings of the Prophet. Islamic scholars for example explain that the verse mentioned earlier is further explained using the following verse:

Those who believe, and have left their homes and striven with their wealth and their lives in Allah's way are of much greater worth in Allah's sight. These are they who are triumphant. (Holy Quran, Al-Tawbah, verse 20).

The above explanation is necessary to answer the complicated question of Islam's viewpoint regarding the use of force. The history of Islam is divided into two stages and it is essential to

differentiate between the two when examining the compatibility of Islam with Gandhi's nonviolent resistance. The first time period is the thirteen years of Prophet Muhammad's stay in Mecca, while the second is the ten years of his life after he migrated to the city Medina and formed an Islamic government and a very large following or *Ummah*.

In the first thirteen years of Muhammad's mission to preach Islam, his followers, who were from different groups and tribes, were prisoned and tortured in every possible way. His response was to tell his followers not to answer violence with violence and be patient towards their fellow human beings, adding that the reason that the ruling elites prosecuted them was because of their ignorance. The rulers of Mecca used different ways to put pressure on new converts so that they would turn their backs to Islam, which did in fact work on some new Muslims (Jafarian, 1388 [2009 A.D.], p. 339). Muslims were tortured until death but were told by the Prophet to avoid violence. For example, the first martyrs in the history of Islam were a couple, *Somayye* and *Yaser*, who were tortured to death, but refused to renounce their fate or fight violently against their oppressors. The avoidance of violence was not only limited to the couple. Their son *Ammar*, who was a leading Muslim figure, did not take revenge even after the triumphant return of Muslims to Mecca from Medina, at which time Muslims had now become the dominant power.

Another group of Muslims who were under harassment but were somehow incapacitated to subsist with the oppressors, were instructed by the Prophet to flee to another land, namely to *Habashe* (present-day Ethiopia). Most of these Muslims did not have the adequate endurance of other Muslims who were practicing non-violent resistance at the time.

Prosecution against Muslims during the Prophet's years in Mecca was not only limited to physical and spiritual issues, but was also used in the economic sphere as well. Muhammad and his followers were forced into an economic siege for three years during which they had to live in a dry, plant-less valley named *Shebe Abitaleb*. All the tribes of Mecca signed an agreement that stressed that they would not have any relations with the Muslims. This agreement meant that non-Muslims were not allowed to marry a Muslim, while also forbidding any economic trade between the two groups. The agreement even prevented the residents of Mecca from giving Muslims food or water while they were under siege. Muslims were not allowed to come out of this valley and if they did, they would be killed or tortured by the rulers of Mecca. During the three years of siege, many Muslims died out of hunger and thirst. Even Muhammad's beloved wife, *Khadija*, died during the siege however the Prophet did not give them permission to fight back. Rather he always told Muslims to be patient and righteous. This part of the history of Islam and the Prophet's teachings were used by Abdul Ghaffar Khan in forming his nonviolent resistance and the nonviolent army of Khudai Khedmatgar. This situation of harassment and nonviolence continued for thirteen years until all the Muslims migrated to the city of Medina to escape prosecution as well as to establish an independent Islamic government.

Islamic scholars have connected this nonviolent struggle to the concept of human dignity. Dignity is an important issue in Islam and is considered a necessity for all human beings; the actions of Muslims should therefore not undermine it. Muhammad Taghi Jafari an Islamic philosopher and intellectual explains that Islam believes violence decreases human beings' dignity and should thus be avoided as much as possible (Jafari, 1385 [1990 A.D.], p. 304). Ibn al Arabi, another Islamic scholar, elaborates that the reason

behind why prophet Muhammad became very upset in regards to the cruelty a Jew had suffered, was that in Islam each human being has a soul that is given by God and has a dignity that should not be put aside. This emphasizes the fact that the Prophet saw every human being as equal in regards to their divine soul (Ibn Arabi, 2009, p. 527).

As discussed earlier however, once in power, Islam does permit the use of violence in certain circumstances. Morteza Motahari argues that in Islamic Fiqh, there are three reasons for exercising violence based on necessity. The first reason is to stop the perpetrator from doing more crimes and so that he/she will learn their lesson. The second reason is to stop other people from committing a crime by looking at the consequences of using violence; in this way the spread of violence is stopped. The third reason is the right of violence that is given to the victim and/or his/her family after being hurt by the perpetrator although forgiveness is very much encouraged in the Quran. In Islamic Fiqh other than these exceptions, violence is not permitted at all in any occasion. Also, it should be considered that even these three exceptions need to have their specific situation and conditions that the violence becomes permissible. Aside from that, using violence in these three instances is the last solution in the Islamic Fiqh (Motahari, 1386 [2007 A.D.], p. 220). From the *Sirah* of the Prophet, it could be understood that even when violence is used in the time of Prophet in Medina, it was the last solution and he always preferred and preached peace (Sertkaya & Keskin, 2020, p. 12).

This is why when during the Prophet's life in Medina, the Muslim city-state was attacked by massive armies from Mecca in several instances Quranic verses permitting the use of force in a

defensive war were revealed for the first time. This points to the fact that in Islam, permission for the use of violence is the exception rather than the rule. In this case, when a foreign invading army seeking the destruction of the new Muslim society and the occupation of its land marched towards Medina the first verse of the Quran permitting the use of violence was revealed to the Prophet by declaring, "Permission to fight is granted to those who are attacked; because they have been wronged. God indeed has the power to help them" (Holy Quran, Al-Hajj, verse 39).

It is important to note that even in such instances, permission to use violence in Islam comes with certain limitations. Allameh Tabataba'i a prominent Islamic scholar writes that Muslims were asked by the Prophet that even during an inevitable war, they should fight and try their best to decrease death casualties as much as possible (Tabataba'i, 1999, p. 13). There is a verse in the Quran that says "Good and evil [conduct] are not equal. Repel [evil] with what is best. [If you do so,] if there was a strong enmity between you and someone else, then he becomes a sympathetic friend" (Holy Quran, Fussilat, verse 34).

Verse 39 of chapter 22 is the first verse in the Quran that allows the use of force and the participation of Muslims in war. This verse was revealed to the Prophet in the second year of his stay in Medina when the new Islamic society came under threat of annihilation when an invading army from Mecca was fast approaching the city. The verse allowed Muslims to form a defensive army and led to the battle of Badr, Islam's first war. It is interesting to note that during the fifteen years of Islam before this war Muslims were tortured in every possible way in Mecca, and they repeatedly asked the Prophet for permission to fight back, however, his constant reply was to resist in a non-violent way.

God had not given them such permission (Tabataba'i, 1985, p. 384). From this verse onwards however and as explained by the Prophet, defensive wars were allowed in the case where a foreign army attacked Muslim societies, while violence was not permitted when dealing with oppression from within the society one was living in, as was the case of Gandhi and Khan's India. Another interesting point is that violence is the exception rather than the rule in Islam. "Permission" is necessary for a violent reaction, which is only given when your land is under the threat of occupation, and in all other instances, violence is forbidden. To make the issue clearer, it is useful to bring it into a more recent context. Thus, for example, according to Islamic teachings, the French had the right to use force in self-defense when coming under attack from invading Nazi Germany, while in all other situations' violence would be banned.

Even for these kinds of wars, Islam puts various limitations, which are revealed through different verses such as "And fight in God's cause against those who wage war against you but do not commit aggression for surely, God does not love aggressors" (Holy Quran, Al-Baqarah, verse 190). This verse explains that in Islam only defense is permitted and any form of aggression is banned.

Another limitation on the use of violence in Islam is that these defensive wars can only be waged in the service of justice and in support of defenseless people whether Muslim or Non-Muslim. The Quran explains that had these defensive and just wars had not been permitted then "the earth would have been filled with corruption" (Holy Quran, Al-Baqarah, verse 251).

Another important instance in the Prophet's life that shows that in Islam force can be used only in a defensive capacity is the returning of Muslims to Mecca in the final years of the Prophet's

life. In 630 C.E or the 8th year of the Prophet's stay in Medina, many Muslims, who had now become the majority population in the area, went to Mecca for pilgrimage for the first time. The Prophet and his followers who went for the pilgrimage numbered around ten thousand, a number greater than all the residents of Mecca. However even though this would have been a perfect opportunity to invade Mecca, based on the instructions of the Prophet, they all went completely unarmed towards Mecca, the city which hosted their enemies. When one of the Muslims named *Saad ibn Obade* entered Mecca he said that today is the day of the war, as Muslims were now far superior to their former oppressors and could take revenge, however, the Prophet told him to correct himself and say that today is the day of mercy (Rashad et al, 2001, p. 315). There was not even the smallest conflict between the two groups and Muhammad told the rulers of Mecca, who for over twenty years had used violence in every possible way against Muslims, that "there is no blame on you, God will forgive you because he is the best merciful." Thus, Islam again forbade the use of violence when the danger of being annihilated by a larger invading foreign army had faded away and Muslims had become the more powerful party (Jafarian, 1388 [2009 A.D.], p. 345).

7. Conclusion

According to Abdul Ghaffar Khan, nonviolence resistance, as practiced by Gandhi was not only compatible with Islam, but also Prophet Mohammad had taught and practiced nonviolence much earlier than Gandhi. This is in line with the dominant literature on the topic, such as the writings of Easwaran (1999). At the same time, other scholars such as Rowell (2009) and Milton-Edwards (2006) have associated Islam and specifically the concept of Jihad with

violence and terrorism. This paper on the other hand argues that Islam has a complex approach when it comes to the use of violence. Nonviolent resistance as practiced by Gandhi and Khan is similar to the behavior of Prophet Mohammad and his Muslim followers when they were residing in the city of Mecca. During this period Muslims were severely oppressed and prosecuted, however, they were instructed to practice nonviolent resistance by the Prophet. They all resisted for a higher goal and suffered immensely in order to fulfill it. However, when the Prophet and his followers immigrated to the city of Medina, this approach changed. In this city of Medina, the number of Islam's followers increased dramatically and the Prophet was able to form a majority Muslim community in the city. When this new Muslim political entity came under the threat of an invading army from Mecca, for the first time Quranic verses permitting the use of force in defensive wars were revealed.

Therefore, rather than arguing that Islam fully corresponds to nonviolent resistance, as Khan did, or completely rejects such methods, we can argue that Islam taught nonviolent resistance when Muslims were pressed from within their society, such as the time when Muslims were living as a minority in Mecca. At the same time when a foreign invading army threatens the very existence of the Muslim Ummah, Islam permits the use of violence based on the Quranic verses presented in this paper. Based on this second approach Prophet Mohammad fought in major defensive wars. In cases where a foreign army threatens annihilation, nonviolent methods which rely on "shaming" the oppressor are not very effective, and this is why the Quran and the Prophet permitted the use of force. Having said that, it should be also noted that being compatible with human dignity, non-violence is a priority to be chosen if possible, as the sira of the Prophet demonstrated in the triumphant return of Muslims to Mecca.

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