



## Allama Mashriqi & Mahatma Gandhi

*On Allama Mashriqi's 47th Death Anniversary*

**By Historian Nasim Yousaf**

On the 47<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Allama Mashriqi's death, I would like to put forward a comparison of Mashriqi to another prominent leader from the Indian sub-continent: Mahatma Gandhi. While the two men shared some similarities — both were nominated for the Nobel Prize (Mashriqi for his monumental work *Tazkirah* and Gandhi for his non-violence) and confronted the challenges of liberating India from British colonial rule — it is their serious political and ideological differences that ultimately defined their relationship.

Mashriqi and Gandhi both completed their early studies in India, and subsequently traveled to England for higher education. Earlier in their careers, both men dressed like Englishmen, but they soon became disillusioned with British culture; guided by their religions (Mashriqi a Muslim and Gandhi a Hindu) and taking pride in their own culture, the men came to value simplicity and the native way of living over the foreign traditions. Thus, both men renounced their previous standard of living, and left their professions in order to dedicate their lives to liberating the nation.

In British India, their respective campaigns began in the streets and villages of the country. Both traveled by train on un-cushioned, hard wooden benches in third class compartments, rubbing shoulders with unprivileged persons. Their tours were to remote locations — from street to street, village to village, and city to city — while enduring scorching heat, bitter cold, dusty pavements, and awful stench from the stagnant water in impoverished areas. To further disseminate

their messages across the nation, both men wrote (and responded to public queries) in their respective publications, Mashriqi in *Al-Islah* and Gandhi in *Harijan*.

Similarities in their means of transportation and communication aside, it was the *content* of their messages that revealed the sharpest differences between the two leaders. Gandhi's aim was to seek independence through a transfer of power, whereas Mashriqi felt that *true* freedom could only be achieved by toppling the Government. Mashriqi believed that a transfer of power would have serious negative consequences. It was this ideological distinction between the two leaders that resulted in many of their political differences. For instance, Mashriqi refused to negotiate with the British for a transfer of power, whereas Gandhi held parleys with the rulers at various times. Furthermore, the two men could not reach an agreement on *The Constitution of Free India 1946 A.C.*, which had been framed under the guidance of Mashriqi and protected the rights of Muslims, Hindus and other communities of British India. And most notably, Mashriqi never accepted the plan for partition of India, as he felt that the division of the country would weaken its power, bring everlasting hostility between Muslims and Hindus, and lead to other grave repercussions. By contrast, Gandhi ultimately accepted the last Viceroy of India's (Lord Mountbatten) plan for partition (announced on June 03, 1947). In a sudden and unexpected departure from Gandhi's previous public statements, he pleaded and impressed upon the Indian National Congress to accept the plan.

Ultimately, both men paid a price for their role in the freedom movement. They were harassed, physically attacked by hooligans, and arrested by the Government. Mashriqi was "stabbed" (see *The Canberra Times*, June 11, 1947) for attempting to prevent the break-up of India and Gandhi was ultimately killed for accepting partition. Gandhi was assassinated on January 30, 1948, while Mashriqi died on August 27, 1963. Their deaths were widely mourned, sending followers and supporters into a state of shock. A large number of people attended their funerals, and countless others paid their respects from around the world. Although Allama Mashriqi and Mahatma Gandhi have passed, their legacies live on through their followers around the world.

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