

## Non-Violence, Islam and Pakhtunwali

### Introduction

Violent and non-violent concepts/policies are very old but the true manifestation of these two policies can be seen in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While on the one hand the champions of violence led the world to two World Wars resulting in the deaths of millions of people, on the other hand it also saw the champions of non-violent policy in action in the persons of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, also known as Ba'acha Khan and Badshah Khan. Though the first three are well-known personalities to the world of non-violent policies, the last one is least known outside his own region and the Indian sub-continent. The fact is that Ba'acha Khan role was rather more difficult than the other three, because the area and the people where he worked were considered to be least favorable for such kind of movement. But in spite of the difficulties he launched a true non-violent movement among these violent people of the Frontier and changed their outlook towards politics, life and death.

While preaching non-violence Ba'acha Khan blended together the teachings of Islam with the traditions of Pakhtunwali because he knew it very well that Pakhtuns love their traditions and religion equally. This was the reason that while preaching non-violence Ba'acha Khan would always quote the Holy Prophet to strengthen his argument. Ba'acha Khan's blending religion with Pakhtunwali paid off quite well and was able to unite large number of Pakhtuns under his non-violent movement, known as *Khudai Khidmatgar*.

But this is very unfortunate that this true proponent of non-violence has received little recognition in the world rather he is misunderstood by many even in his homeland. Many call him as the true follower of Mahatma Gandhi, which is actually belittling this great man and his services, who developed his policy of non-violence independently and much earlier than he met Gandhi. Ba'acha Khan and Gandhi worked together but both have their own status at their own place. The fact of the matter is that Ba'acha Khan suffered more than Gandhi for his non-violent policy. He suffered socially, economically and bodily more than any other leader while propagating and practicing non-violence.

### The Savage Frontier:

The North-Western Parts of Pakistan, which are now known as Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, are inhabited by the well-known Pakhtuns/Pashtuns/Afghans. Pakhtuns are known for their fighting skills and are considered as born-fighters. The British have acknowledged them as people of the 'Martial Race'. If we look at the history of the Pakhtuns it is replete with fighting, skirmishes and tribal wars.

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They have never allowed any foreign ruler to rule their territory peacefully. That is the reason that it is said that conquering Pakhtuns is easy but to rule them is very difficult. All those foreign rulers who have ruled this territory have never been allowed to remain in peace; all have remained in constant warfare with the Pakhtuns. Commenting on this aspect of the Pakhtuns/Afghans history well-known Indian scholar Subroto Roy has commented:

“Afghans have hardly lived a peaceful decade since Gengiz Khan destroyed them avenging his grandson in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. Ghazni, Ghor, Peshawar etc. were launch-pads for attacks against the settled people of India’s fertile plains (most recently, the October 1947 attack on Kashmir Valley) while Herat saw wars by and against Iran.”<sup>i</sup> Referring to the barbarous nature of Pakhtuns he quotes Lyall, a British administrator, in these words: “wretched, treacherous barbarians with whom it was an unfortunate necessity to have any dealings at all ... I can only sympathize with the Afghan’s love for his country and his hatred against those disturb him, although he has no scruple in disturbing others to the best of his savage ability.”<sup>ii</sup>

The Pakhtuns’ savagery and barbarity have been made the topics of their writings by Tagore and Rudyard Kipling, the well-known 20<sup>th</sup> Century writers. Spice was added to the savage characters of Pakhtuns by giving instances of their savagery from Fielding King-Hall’s *Thirty Days of India* by Pyarelal in *Thrown to the Wolves*. Narrating one such story he writes: “One Pathan was sitting on the ground listening intently to a radio broadcasting programme while his neighbor continued to chatter. The first man told the talker to shut up, but the later observed that he had as much right to speak as ‘that loud mouth over there’. The radio fan promptly switched off the human ‘loud speaker’ by sticking a knife into his ribs”.<sup>iii</sup>

The British officials and historians have widely written about the campaigns and wars on the territory of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. They were the one who have termed the Pakhtuns violent and wild. Actually these tendencies in the nature of Pakhtuns are due to environment and culture. The majority of Pakhtuns’ lands are arid, semi-arid and mountainous; and not suitable for agricultural purposes. Due to harsh environment they developed aggressive nature and culture. Amongst many traditions of the Pakhtuns, *Badal* (revenge) has contributed more than anything else in the incessant wars, fighting and tribal feuds. Under the tradition of *Badal* if any injustice, damage, injury or fatality is incurred upon a Pakhtoon, then he, his family, or even tribe are bound by traditions to take revenge. Once this happens then it becomes a continuous phenomenon and feuds run in generations.

#### **Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his activities:**

In this environment was born Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan in January 1890, who introduced these people to such a philosophy which was contradictory to their nature, temperament and traditions. Till this day he was the only man in the history of Pakhtuns/Afghans who “invented a new, living political philosophy as a constructive force for his people’s peace and progress.”<sup>iv</sup> Ghaffar Khan belonged to the elite class of the Pakhtuns, the Khans. His father Behram Khan was a Khan of Uthmanzai, Charsadda, however, Behram Khan was of different character than his fellow Khans. Neither he was cruel like other Khans nor was he averse to modern education. That’s why he sent both sons, Dr. Khan Sahib and Khan Abdul

Ghaffar Khan to receive modern and English education. Abdul Ghaffar Khan during his school years at Edwards Memorial Mission High School, Peshawar was impressed tremendously by the selfless service of the Head Master of the School, Rev. E.F.E. Wigram. Though Ba'acha Khan could not complete education at the school, the stay and contact with Mr. Wigram had a very lasting effect on young Abdul Ghaffar Khan.<sup>v</sup>

Another important man who influenced him in his formative years was Haji Sahib of Turangzai whose real name was Haji Fazli Wahid. Ba'acha Khan joined him in his social reforms' activities and particularly in the establishment of Educational institutions. Though Ba'acha Khan collaborated with him in his social reforms and educational activities, this cooperation came to an end when Haji Sahib took up arms and started armed *jihad* against the British. The British in retaliation closed all the educational institutions established by Haji Sahib.<sup>vi</sup>

This temporary setback could not dampen the zeal and enthusiasm of young Abdul Ghaffar Khan, who was determined to the progress and uplift of his downtrodden and feud-ridden people. He initiated many endeavours for the reformation of the society, such as *Anjuman-i-Islah-ul-Afaghana*, whose main objective was to eradicate the social evils from the Pakhtoon society. He also launched a Commission Shop to encourage Pakhtuns to start their own businesses and get rid of the exploitation of the non-Muslim businessmen.<sup>vii</sup>

The hallmark in Ba'acha Khan's struggle for reformation of the Pakhtun society was the launching of a non-violent movement, *Khudai Khidmatgars*. This was an unthinkable endeavor in a society plagued by centuries old tribal and factional warfare. Where gun was considered part and parcel of man's dress and revenge was a basic tenant of tribal code of life. The Pakhtuns were submerged in this never ending warfare and the foreigners were taking advantage of their division and were ruling them. In the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> Century the British occupied the lands of Pakhtuns and took full advantage of their feuds & disunity. Winston Churchill, the former Prime Minister of England wrote about the disunity and feuds of Pakhtuns in these words, "except at harvest-time, when self-preservation enjoins a temporary truce, the Pathan tribes are always engaged in private or public war... Every large house is a real feudal fortress...with battlements, turrets [and] drawbridges. Every village has its defense. Every family cultivates its vendetta; every clan, its feud." Everyone had their "accounts to settle" and "nothing is ever forgotten, and very few debts are left unpaid." Making this an excuse; the British suppressed Pakhtuns with all kind of cruel and violent tactics, including aerial bombings.<sup>viii</sup>

Ba'acha Khan knew well that British violence and rule can not be defeated with violence because violence would result in more violence. He thought about an alternative, which was non-violence in the face of violence. Years later while explaining his concept of non-violence he told an interviewer, "For today's children and the world, my thoughts are that only if they accept nonviolence can they escape destruction, and live a life of peace. If this doesn't happen, then the world will be in ruins"<sup>ix</sup> Ba'acha Khan had a memory of violence and its results. When he was only 07 years of age the British ruthlessly suppressed an uprising

that had engulfed the whole of frontier. He also has the knowledge of the destruction that was brought by the First World War.<sup>x</sup>

### **Ba'acha Khan and Gandhi's Philosophies of Non-Violence:**

Some of the writers in general while the Indians in particular believe that Ba'acha Khan developed the philosophy of Non-Violence due to Gandhi's influence. While critically evaluating both philosophies one can find similarities but both roots and origins are different. While Gandhi took inspiration from Hindu dogma, Ba'acha Khan was inspired by Islam. Mukulika Banerjee commenting on these aspects writes:

“In the light of these similarities it is understandable that previous commentators have attributed the KK's [*Khudai Khidmatgars*] non-violent ideology to the influence of Gandhi's thinking. This simple process of diffusion was similarly assumed by both the KK movement's Congress allies and its Muslim League critics. In reality, however, the constituents of KK ideology are quite otherwise. Although the KK undoubtedly drew on Congress's experience of the precise techniques of civil disobedience, the basic underlying principle that violence must be eschewed had been grasped by Badshah Khan long before he met Gandhi, through his own reflections on the needs and short-comings of Pathan society.”<sup>xi</sup>

Ba'acha Khan himself, too, very clearly stated that “It is wrong to assume that Gandhi was the first to set foot on a non-violent campaign in order to attain *swaraj* [self-rule]. About 1,300 years ago, the Prophet of Arabia had recourse to non-violence.”<sup>xii</sup> Amitabh Pal writes about the two persons' approach towards non-violence in these words: “...Ghaffar Khan started forming his project of nonviolence and social reform before he came into contact with Gandhi. And his nonviolence drew its inspiration from the Koran and the Prophet Muhammad, in contrast to Gandhi, whose ideals were largely based on the Hindu holy book the Bhagavad Gita, the Bible, and the writings of Thoreau and Tolstoy.”<sup>xiii</sup> Ba'acha Khan was a true and devout Muslim who derived his inspiration from Holy Quran and the life of the Holy Prophet. Once he stated that “It is my inmost conviction, that Islam is *amal, yakeen, muhabat*” – selfless service, faith, and love”<sup>xiv</sup> It was this conviction for which Badshah Khan struggled throughout his life and tolerated all kinds of difficulties. Recognizing this Ekntah Easwaran writes, “Badshah Khan based his life and work on this profound principle, raising an army of courageous men and women who translated it into action. Were his example better known, the world might come to recognize that the highest religious values of Islam are deeply compatible with a nonviolence that has the power to resolve conflicts even against heavy odd.”<sup>xv</sup>

Ba'acha Khan social and political programs can be best understood in the light of Islamic and Universal values. He drew inspiration from the Islamic values of “*Sabr* (tenaciously holding on to a righteous cause without revenge or retaliation)”<sup>xvi</sup> Though Ba'acha Khan was a devout Muslim, he was free from the mosque ideology. He developed his Islamic values independently of the mosque, and whenever he doubted anything, he resorted to *chila* (meditation in seclusion) or fast and would come out with clear understanding and then would never doubt himself.<sup>xvii</sup>

Writing about Ba'acha Khan and Gandhi non-violence Makulika Banerjee writes: "In respect of non-violence, where Gandhi drew on traditions of androgyny, Badshah Khan drew instead on traditions of self-restraint. While Islam condoned revenge, it valued forgiveness more highly. And within *Pukhunwali*, while it was creditable to seek revenge, a man gained even more honour by showing restraint and responsibility, particularly in the context of an enemy who requested sanctuary. Thus I would argue that the strength of will which Gandhi attributes to the feminine principle in Indian cosmology is similarly present as a virtue of ideal Pathan manhood. It was thus possible for the KKs to establish a non-violent persona from within their own cultural resources without the need for Gandhian philosophy. Where Gandhi mocked and subverted British hyper-masculinity through androgyny, Badshah Khan and KK subverted it by providing a countervailing image of *truly manful* restraint and self-control, as opposed to the cruelty and noisy bluster of the colonial 'mad dog'"<sup>xviii</sup>

### **Is Non-Violence compatible with Islamic Teachings?**

Some non-Muslim writers in general and western writers in particular have attributed violence to be part of Islamic ideology. This is particularly true after 9/11 events. While discussing the violent and non-violent aspects of Islamic ideology Barbara Metcalf has discussed those with reference to the Islamic revivalist movements in India. She has discussed two main discourses of these movements.

"The first is *tajdid*, a commitment to the way of the Prophet; the second is *jihad*. She argues that these movements used the concept of *jihad* to refer to the great effort or action required to conform to the way of God. Such *jihad* encompasses struggle at two levels. The 'lesser *jihad*' (*jihad-i-asghar*) relates to legitimate military struggle and 'holy war' against injustice. But the greater *jihad*' (*jihad-i-akbar*) denotes the inner struggle of an individual to develop a true commitment to Islam and cultivate the spiritual qualities which the Quran cherishes."<sup>xix</sup> Even in the situations where lesser *jihad* is permissible, Islam does not always advocate it; sometimes it prefers *shahadat* (martyrdom). Islamic philosophy of *shahadat* is that *shaheed* (martyr) bears witness to the injustices of status quo and lays down his life in the way of truth and God. Makulika Banerjee, quoting Dr. Ali Shari'ati, explains *shaheed* and *shahadat* in these words:

"... a *shaheed* bears witness to the injustices of the status quo, and that the essence of martyrdom is bearing witness to what is taking place in this silent and secret tie... it is the only means of attack and defence and the only manner of resistance to truth, right and justice that can remain alive at a time and under a regime in which uselessness, falsity and oppression rule. Thus when the balance of power is such that *jihad* is not a feasible option, the righteous course of action is to court martyrdom."<sup>xx</sup>

Ba'acha Khan chose this path of righteousness and truth against falsehood, corruption and immorality. Though his death was not a dramatic one, his life was spent in struggle against injustices and falsehood, which brought upon him and his family numerous tragedies and sufferings. Ba'acha Khan spent more than half of his life in jails but he never deviated from his chosen path. During the course of

this long struggle Ba'acha Khan stood like a rock; propagated and practiced non-violence and never abandoned it even in the face of utmost cruelties upon him, family or followers.<sup>xxi</sup>

“On the basis of his study of martyrdom in the world’s great religions, Uberoi argues that sociologically, martyrs are born of the tension between power and status, state and clergy. By rejecting both realms, the martyr occupies a third realm (what Weber terms ‘other-worldliness), from which he denounces both temporal power and established religion. The martyr rejects society’s rules and chooses to die in order to secure its salvation. We can see something of this in the case of Badshah Khan. His programme of education and self-improvement questioned the fatalistic dogma of the established religion represented by the *mullah*, while his non-cooperation with the colonial institutions overtly challenged the legitimacy of the state.”<sup>xxii</sup>

Mukulika Banerjee argues that most of the martyrs that Uberoi discusses were highly individualistic while the case of Ba'acha Khan was different because he “tried to embody the third realm within a newly formed collective, the *Khudai Khidmatgars*, thereby sharing with them the opportunity to challenge church and state.”<sup>xxiii</sup> This sharing made all the *Khudai Khidmatgars* eligible to be called martyrs. This sense of greater achievement electrified the followers of Ba'acha Khan. When we look at the concept of *shahadat*, it includes voluntary choice of death in face of cruelties, injustice and falsehood. The *Khudai Khidmatgars* also chose sufferings and deaths voluntarily, because whenever Ba'acha Khan would invite them to join his ranks, he would, in advance, warn them about the dangers they would face. He would tell them “... given the brutal actions being taken by the authorities against the KK, death was a real possibility. He stressed, however, that it would be a noble death in a great cause.”<sup>xxiv</sup>

On the one hand while he was giving them the hope of martyrdom on the other he was also giving them the chance of noble life even if they survived. In Islam closely associated with *shahadat* is the concept of *Ghazi*. *Ghazi* is the one who survives *jihad*, be that militant or other service of hard nature.<sup>xxv</sup> Thus a *Khudai Khidmatgar* was successful in both ways, if he died, he died a martyr’s death but if he survived, he lived a life of a *Ghazi*, again a noble achievement.

Islam also encourages its followers to show patience and forgiveness. Ba'acha Khan also used these concepts to advocate non-violence policy. In one of his discussions with Mahatma Gandhi he told him a story of an argument with a down-country Muslim regarding non-violence: “I cited chapter and verse from the Qur’an to show the great emphasis that Islam had laid on peace, which is its cornerstone, and I showed him how the greatest figures in Islamic history were known for their forbearance and self-restraint than for their fierceness.’ He [Ba'acha Khan] viewed his struggle as a *jihad* in which only the enemy was holding swords.”<sup>xxvi</sup> He also quite often referred to the Holy Prophet life in Mecca when the non-Muslims would persecute and cruelly treat him and his followers but the Holy Prophet would always advise his followers to show patience. When Mecca was conquered by the Muslims, the Holy Prophet showed the pinnacle of forgiveness and large heartedness. He forgave all his personal as well as Muslims’ enemies and thus showed to the world that true Islam does not take revenge but forgive<sup>xxvii</sup> because Islam prefers forgiveness over revenge.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Ba'acha Khan quite often used the example of Holy Prophet (PBUH) in his messages. While inviting his followers to show restraint and patience he stated:

“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 (Peace be upon him), but you are not aware of it. That weapon is patience and righteousness. No power on earth can stand against it. When you go back to your villages, tell your brethren that there is an army of God and its weapon is patience. Endure all hardships. If you exercise patience, victory will be yours.”<sup>xxix</sup>

Ba'acha Khan always stressed upon the humane side of Islam. Highlighting this aspect Begum Nasim Wali Khan, the daughter-in-law of Ba'acha Khan, who was interviewed shortly after his death, remarked: “He told people that Islam operates on a simple principle – never hurt anyone by tongue, by gun, or by hand. Not to lie, steal, and harm is true Islam.”<sup>xxx</sup> Though Ba'acha Khan founded his non-violence philosophy on the basis of religious beliefs, his movement was non-sectarian and was open to all, Muslims as well as non-Muslims. During the Indian partition in 1947 when the lives of Sikhs and Hindus were threatened in the Frontier 10,000 *Khudai Khidmatgars* came out in Peshawar alone to protect them from the attacks of the extremists.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Ba'acha Khan was of the firm view that all religions in the world have come with a message of love and service to humanity and God. He said: “My religion is truth, love and service to God and humanity. Every religion that has come into the world has brought the message of love and brotherhood. Those who are indifferent to the welfare of their fellowmen, whose hearts are empty of love, they do not know the meaning of religion.”<sup>xxxii</sup>

To conclude the religious aspect of non-violence one can say that it depends upon the person to what purpose he/she wants to use religion because interpretation can be made either way one likes. Adam Ericksen discussing the misconceptions regarding different religions writes:

“....Some Christians suggest that Islam is inherently violent, intolerant, and stuck in a never ending war instigated by the Prophet Muhammad himself.... It is easy to fall into this trap. It makes us feel good to think that we (the West, Christians, or whomever) are good, and they (Islam) are bad. But this view is fatally flawed and overly simplistic. Christianity is not peaceful or violent; Christians are peaceful or violent. Islam is not peaceful or violent; Muslims are peaceful or violent. Sacred texts from any religious tradition can be interpreted in a way that leads to violence or in a way that leads to peace. Even the meek and peaceful Jesus said, “I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Mathew 10:34). The responsibility for people of any faith and ultimately of any faith community, is to interpret sacred text in a way that leads to love and compassion....”<sup>xxxiii</sup>

The same idea is further elaborated by Professor Ishtiaq Ahamd of National University of Singapore in these words, “...all religious scriptures are amenable to a variety of interpretations; hence also the Quran and indeed the life of the Prophet (PBUH). Therefore it depends on the enquirer what support he seeks from the sacred sources. For those who are convinced that violence is the way forward for Muslims, they can select those portions of the sacred sources that seem to sanction

violence. On the other hand, those who believe in peaceful and civilized ways of conducting their affairs can find plenty of material in the same sources that confirms their standpoint as well.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

### **Non-Violence and *Pakhtunwali*:**

Generally *Pakhtunwali* or Pakhtuns code of life is explained in such a manner that carries the element of violence and fighting, however, Ba'acha Khan reinterpreted *Pakhtunwali*. It was important to do so because had Ba'acha Khan just emphasized on the Islamic nature of non-violence, the success of his movement was doubtful but coupled with Islamic jargon when he added the traditions of *Pakhtunwali* to it, the chances of his movement success increased. While inviting them to join *Khudai Khidmatgar* organization he challenged different traditions of *Pakhtunwali*. Addressing a gathering at Jehangira (a town in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa) he challenged their bravery and honour in these words:

“Have some shame! You call yourselves Pakhtuns. Do not be so shameless .... Your heads are full of slavery. It is for this reason that you free yourself from the servitude of one to fall into the servitude of the other .... O you cowards! ... Have some sense of honour .... Have some *gherat* [honour] in the cause of Islam .... Feel a little *gherat* for your mothers, sisters and children who are dressed in rags ... get up and throw the yoke off your country.”<sup>xxxv</sup> Ba'acha Khan thus used Pakhtuns' own traditions to instigate them to show honour and courage. Taunting a Pakhtun to be a coward and dishonourable was enough to drive them towards immediate response, and that what exactly happened when Ba'acha Khan challenged their bravery and honour.

Another important aspect that he challenged was Pakhtuns' freedom; freedom is part and parcel of Pakhtuns' society. When he reminded them of British servitude, it had the desired effect on Pakhtuns' mentality. Against feuding, which was rampant amongst the Pakhtuns he used the same language. He told them that to show their bravery they were ready to cut the flesh of their own brothers but they were coward enough not to challenge the British who have occupied the land of their forefathers. By referring to their forefathers, he referred to the Pakhtuns' honour and pride that they take in their lineage and ancestry. He also told the Pakhtuns that *Khudai Khidmatgar* movement was open to all but cowards; however, before joining the movement they have to shed off their feuding. Thus Ba'acha Khan very cleverly put “...the onus on the people themselves to decide if they were in fact as brave and honourable as they considered themselves to be.”<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Ba'acha Khan also reinterpreted the concepts of Pakhtuns' *Melmastia* [hospitality] and *merana* [bravery]. “Traditionally, hospitality in the Frontier was often carried to excess and could be aggressive in its expression of status, oppressive in the indebtedness that it created for the guest, and burdensome for the demands it made on the host. The ostentation, waste and underlying aggressions were incompatible with the principles of frugality and humility advocated by Badshah Khan.”<sup>xxxvii</sup> Ba'acha Khan advised his followers not to be burden on any one, so they have to take their own food and sleep in the mosques while on campaigns or visits. This made it easy to the poor peasants to welcome the honourable guests in their villages and be part of the movement. Further since



joining *Khudai Khidmatgar* movement was exposing themselves to state repression, it was considered as manliness and bravery. Makulika Banerjee concludes this with the following sentence: “Hence the warmth and adequacy of hospitality came to be judged not by its material lavishness, but by what it said of a man’s bravery and commitment to the cause.”<sup>xxxviii</sup>

This takes us to the tradition of *merana*, which means manliness and bravery through physical strength. Ba’acha Khan tried to remove from the concept of bravery the element of violence he believed “that there is no deliverance for the Pathan except through out-and-out acceptance of non-violence. He does not take pride in the fact that Pathan is a fine fighter. He appreciates his bravery but he thinks that he has been spoilt by over praise. He believes that the Pathan has been exploited and kept in ignorance. He wants the Pathan to become braver than he is and wants him to add true knowledge to his bravery. And this he thinks can only be achieved through non-violence.”<sup>xxxix</sup> He said that real *merana* is that when one confronts a powerful and violent opponent with restraint, non-violence, willpower and truthfulness; such behaviour requires inner strength and forgiveness and that was what Ba’acha Khan was able to instill in his followers with great success.<sup>xl</sup>

The most difficult task Ba’acha Khan faced was to convince the Pakhtuns of changing the concept of revenge. Revenge does not always include violence, revenge can be taken by dominating the opponents economically and socially, and that exactly what Ba’acha Khan wanted to convince his tribesmen. “Badshah Khan often suggested that the best way for the Pathans to avenge themselves on the British would be to show them up as the unprincipled villains they were and eject them from India with their reputation in tatters. The chosen method of non-violence and the violent responses it provoked were thus intensely satisfying in so far as they undermined colonial claims about both the Pathans’ inherent violence and anarchy and their own civility and civilization. Badshah Khan noted the many cruel acts being perpetrated by the regime, and asked rhetorically: ‘And these are the civilized *firangis*? They are civilized?’ Thus the KKs were reminded that if they could adhere to non-violence in the face of such provocation they would win honour in the eyes of people all over the world, who would marvel to see what they thought was ‘such a barbarous nation observing patience.’<sup>xli</sup>

The messages of Ba’acha Khan show us that he very successfully assimilated the Islamic ideology with *Pakhtunwali*. For example beside other things he related the Islamic opposition to oppression and slavery with the Pakhtuns’ traditions of freedom and independence. In the same manner he assimilated Islamic values of fraternity and love with Pakhtuns’ values of brotherhood for the cause of unity.<sup>xlii</sup> Ba’acha Khan thus so successfully imbued *Pakhtunwali* in his messages that the well-known Pakhto poet Ghani Khan stated:

*Che qadam da Ba’acha Khan pa qadam na gdi*

*Hagha kas ba sa Pakhtoon au sa Afghan vee*

(Trans. The one who does not follow the footsteps of Ba’acha Khan  
what kind of Pakhtun or Afghan he will be)

We see from the above stated facts that Ba'acha Khan very successfully used religion and *Pakhtunwali* to convince his fellow Pakhtuns that what he was preaching was both Islam and Pakhto. Mukulika Banerjee concluding this discussion writes that Ba'acha Khan provided different ideological models for different types of people in his messages. For a Nationalist who considered himself "... Pathan first and Muslim second could ground his own personal reconciliation to non-violence in aspects of *Pukhunwali*. Those who placed their primary emphasis on being good Muslims could reconcile themselves to non-violence through the lessons Badshah Khan highlighted from the Quran. And those who did not wish to think about such details could base their non-violence on the commands of a leader who was so conspicuously a true and honourable Pathan and a devout and saintly Muslim."<sup>xliii</sup>

Ba'acha Khan raised an army of the non-violent soldiers through his messages. The followers were so well trained, preached and convinced by Ba'acha Khan that they developed an unshakable belief in the efficacy of non-violent policy. Once when Mahatma Gandhi asked Ba'acha Khan followers what they will do if the latter asked them to shun non-violence. They very candidly and clearly stated that they would dissociate themselves from Ba'acha Khan instead of forsaking the non-violence policy.<sup>xliv</sup>

### **Ba'acha Khan's Socio-Political Struggle and Non-Violence:**

The most difficult task before Ba'acha Khan was to practically demonstrate non-violence not only by himself but also by his followers in the face of violent colonial actions. To give it a practical manifestation he founded the *Khudai Khidmatgar* (Servants of God) organization in 1929.<sup>xlv</sup> Ba'acha Khan established this organization as social reform movement but later on it also actively got involved in political activities. Due to their increased influence and anti-British activities the British gave it the name of 'Red Shirts' as the members usually were dressed in red cloths. The British intentionally called them Red Shirts in order to mollify them. Sayed Waqar Ali Shah quoting the viceroy of India explains why they called the movement as "red shirt", "We obviously could not have used the latter phrase [*Khudai Khidmatgars*] in official references, as it would have implied some kind of admission that we were dealing with an association of the pious and godly. Although it may be true that the Red Shirts movement was not inspired by the Bolsheviks, there was a good deal of communistic doctrine (including the use of sickle and hammer badges) connected with it. So the "red shirt" was not entirely an inappropriate term and I think it served its practical purpose pretty successfully."<sup>xlvi</sup>

*Khudai Khidmatgar* movement was open to all on the condition that they would set-aside violence and guns besides taking an oath on the following principles:

- “1. I solemnly and truthfully register my name for enrolment.
2. I will sacrifice my life, wealth and comfort in the cause of the Motherland.
3. I will refrain from party friction, grudges, haughtiness, and will side with the oppressed against the oppressor.

4. I will not enroll myself in any other party, nor will I tender an apology when my party goes to war with alien rulers.
5. I will always obey my officers.
6. I will always follow the path of non-violence.
7. I will serve all humanity, and my object shall be to win freedom for my country and religion.
8. I will always try to be good and just in my dealings.
9. I will never expect a reward for services rendered in His name.
10. All my endeavours shall be to please God without any regard for personal motive, gain or show.<sup>”xlvi</sup>

After the creation of Pakistan while living in Kabul Ba’acha Khan issued a brochure in Pashto in which he redefined the aims and objects of Khudai Khidmatgar Movement. Those were prefaced with the following verse from the Holy Quran; “In your midst there shall arise a group that will incline people’s hearts towards good and forbid them to do evil. These are the people who shall find fulfillment.”<sup>xlvi</sup>

“He (Badshah Khan) starts from the premise that God being formless needs no personal service from anyone. A Khudai Khidmatgar will, therefore, regard service done to God’s creatures as service done to Him, and serve His creation without any material compensation or reward. The principles of the Khudai Khidmatgar movement are set down as under:

1. A Khudai Khidmatgar will do no injury by his actions or speech to any of God’s creatures nor do unto others what he would not like to be done to himself.
2. A Khudai Khidmatgar will not indulge in slander, back-biting or falsehood.
3. A Khudai Khidmatgar will, wherever he is, combat oppression and high-handedness by goodness and wean the opponent from evil by love and affection.
4. A Khudai Khidmatgar will not be a party to oppression and will always stand by the oppressed.
5. A Khudai Khidmatgar will keep out of all factions, harbor no revenge nor bear enmity towards anyone.
6. A Khudai Khidmatgar will shed all evil customs and practices harmful to society and carry on a ceaseless crusade for their eradication.
7. A Khudai Khidmatgar will lead a life of simplicity.
8. A Khudai Khidmatgar will live by his honest industry, eschew idleness and not covet more than his due share.
9. A Khudai Khidmatgar will dedicate himself heart and soul to his country and society and serve them in all honesty. He will never barter the interests

of his country or society for riches or office, and will shirk no sacrifice for their sake.

10. A Khudai Khidmatgar will obey every decision or order of his organization, that has the backing of the majority, and faithfully implement it.

On enrolment every Khudai Khidmatgar takes the following pledge:

“With God as witness I promise that I shall be faithful to my organization and shall honestly observe the above mentioned ten principles.”

The brochure concludes with another saying from the Book:

“God does not ameliorate the conditions of a people that do nothing for their own amelioration.”<sup>xlix</sup>

The movement over a period of time enrolled between 100,000 to 300,000 members who dedicated themselves to social, political reform and they worked for the improvement of peasantry and poor. They also struggled for the independence of their homeland from the British colonial masters through peaceful non-violent methods.<sup>1</sup>

After becoming the member of the organization, the *Khudai Khidmatgars* proved to be true followers of non-violence not as a policy but as a faith and belief. They proved it again and again while facing the brutalities of British colonial masters. The British tried to break their resolve of non-violence through extreme brutal actions including mass killings, torture and destruction of their homes but failed. They used extreme violence against Ba’acha Khan and his followers because they could not believe that non-violence can be practiced by violent Pakhtuns. Such extreme brutality the British did not use against other non-violent workers in India. But in the Frontier their policy was different. A British report in 1930 explained the policy in these words, “The brutes must be ruled brutally and by brutes.”<sup>li</sup>

The decade of 1930s was a difficult year for *Khudai Khidmatgar* movement as the British had unleashed unparalleled atrocities on the leaders and workers of *Khudai Khidmatgars*. In order to get the support of a party at all-India level, Ba’acha Khan associated the movement with All-India National Congress.<sup>lii</sup> Ba’acha Khan made an alliance with the Congress because their agendas also had common points including non-violence; however, Ba’acha Khan commitment to non-violence was greater than the Congressites. It is evident from the fact that when during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War the Congress offered their support to the War through Poona Offer (September 1939) Ba’acha Khan was disappointed and he decided to resign from the Congress Working Committee. While resigning from the Committee he informed Gandhi:

“Some recent resolutions of the Congress working Committee indicate that they are restricting the use of non-violence to the fight for India’s freedom against constituted authority. How far and in what manner this will have to be applied in the future I cannot say. The near future will perhaps throw light on this. Meanwhile it is difficult for me to continue in the Congress Working Committee, and I am resigning from it. I should like to make it clear that the non-violence I have believed in and preached to my brethren of the *Khudai Khidmatgars* is much

wider. It affects all our life, and only this has permanent value. Unless we learn this lesson of non-violence fully we shall never do away with the deadly feuds which have been the curse of the people of the Frontier. Since we took to non-violence and the *Khudai Khidmatgars* pledged them to it, we have largely succeeded in ending these feuds. Non-violence has added greatly to the courage of the Pathans. Because they were previously addicted to violence far more than others, they have profited by non-violence much more. We shall never really and effectively defend ourselves except through non-violence. *Khudai Khidmatgars* must, therefore, be what our names imply pure serving servants of God and humanity by laying down our own lives and never taking any life.”<sup>liii</sup>

The following discussion in 1938 between Ghani Khan (Ba’acha Khan son) and Bacon, a British Officer, who had served in the Frontier during the 1930 Civil-Disobedience Movement, can be seen as an example of the *Khudai Khidmatgars*’ commitment to non-violence. Bacon said, Ghani Khan later recalled:

“{Bacon} told me, “Ghani, I was the Assistant Commissioner in Charsadda. The Red Shirts would be brought to me. I had orders to give them each two years rigorous imprisonment. I would say, ‘Are you a Red Shirt?’ They would say yes. ‘Do you want freedom?’ ‘Yes, I want freedom.’ If I release you, will you do it again?’ ‘Yes.’

[Bacon] said, “I would want to get up and hug him. But instead I would write, ‘Two years.’”<sup>liv</sup>

This kind of sincerity and commitment to the cause was made possible by Ba’acha Khan through his personal examples. During the protest demonstrations he would always be in the forefront and would take the hits shoulder to shoulder to his workers. “Whenever there was a spate of arrests, he would be among first of the arrested. His arrests and incarceration were most humiliating and most painful ever borne by any leader of his stature. During the Quit India Movement, he was beaten hard before he was arrested and taken to Hari Pur Jail from a protest rally. He had received severe injuries; his ribs had been broken. The man, who preached and practiced non violence, was subjected to worst forms of violence.”<sup>lv</sup> He was taken to the prison hand-cuffed and during imprisonment fetters were put on his feet. He was put into a dingy, stinking, solitary cell and no visitors were allowed to him. His movements were restricted and he was not allowed to come out of his cell for a single moment.<sup>lvi</sup>

The worst kind of brutality, the *Khudai Khidmatgars* faced, was during the Qissa Khawani Bazar massacre on April 23, 1930. On that day the British resorted to unprecedented firing on the unarmed agitators. Gene Sharp of Harvard who has worked on the non-violent movement writes about that day in these words:

“When those in front fell down wounded by the shots, those behind came forward with their breasts bared and exposed themselves to the fire, so much so that some people got as many as 21 bullet wounds in their bodies, and all the people stood their ground without getting into a panic.... The Anglo-Indian paper of Lahore, which represents the official view, itself wrote to the effect that the people came forward one after another to face the firing and when they fell wounded they were dragged back and others came forward to be shot at. This state

of things continued from 11 till 5 o'clock in the evening. When the number of corpses became too many, the ambulance cars of the government took them away [and burned them].”<sup>lvii</sup>

Ba'acha Khan throughout his life lived for his ideals and never deviated from it. He personally suffered a lot during his long political life. He spent more than half of his life (52 years) in jail, both British and Pakistani.<sup>lviii</sup> He never looked for power and chair. Ghaffar Khan was offered the Presidency of All-India National Congress, but he declined the offer saying ' "I am a simple soldier and *Khudai Khidmatgar*, and I only want to serve.”<sup>lix</sup> In 1962 when he was incarcerated in jail the Amnesty International declared him Prisoner of the Year.<sup>lx</sup> In recognition of his peace services in 1969 the government of India awarded him "Nehru Peace Award for 1969"<sup>lxi</sup> and then in 1985 he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Two years later (1987) India gave him "*Bharat Ratna*", the highest Indian civil award, for the first time to any non-Indian.<sup>lxii</sup>

Like his life his death was also a mixture of non-violence and violence; non-violence on the part of his followers and violence on the part of his opponents. He died in 1988 at a Peshawar (Pakistan) hospital but according to his will his body was taken to Jalalabad, Afghanistan, for burial. That was the period of Afghan *Mujahideen* insurgency against the Communists, but to give respect to this great non-violent soldier of Islam and Pakhtuns a temporary cease-fire was pronounced by the warring parties. Still there was a bomb explosion, which resulted in the death of 15 people.<sup>lxiii</sup>

Adam Ericksen writing on the achievements of Ba'acha Khan commented: "*Khan played an integral role in ending the British occupation of India, but unfortunately, few have ever heard of him. His faith in Islam led him to forgive and love his enemies even in the face of brutal violence. He is a beacon of hope for our strange world that continues to travel toward destruction and violence, Khan shows us that the way to change hearts and minds is not through violent actions or violent words, but through faith, love, and nonviolence.*"<sup>lxiv</sup>

And especially in this violence-ridden world of 21<sup>st</sup> century Badshah Khan Message of love and selfless service to humanity is even more important. "Badshah Khan is not dead. His example is a living force which can come to life to inspire and lead people wherever they turn to nonviolence with faith and courage.... A devout Muslim, he showed in his life a face of Islam which non-Islamic countries seldom see, proving that within the scope of Islam exists a noble alternative to violence...."<sup>lxv</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

Pakhtuns or Afghans have always been portrayed as violent and savage tribesmen of the North-West of Indian sub-continent. This belief was particularly highlighted in the aftermath of 9/11 events. The study of Ba'acha Khan's non-violent movement shows to the world the other face of the Pakhtuns, which is humane, kind and non-violent. This study has reached to the conclusion that it depends on the leadership, what kind of role they want from their people. The same people who many portray as cruel, warlike, savage and violent were

transformed into an army of non-violence. They proved to the world that even in the face of utmost brutalities, their faith in the non-violence cannot be shaken.

On the other hand when the same people were dragged into the cold war by the so-called free and civilized world against the Communists in Afghanistan between 1979 and 1991, they were trained for brutalities, cruelties and were transformed into violent resistance groups. The Islamic concepts of patience and forgiveness were put on the back-burner and the concepts of *jihad*, particularly militant *jihad*, was preached and highlighted to them. So much so that *jihad-i-asghar* (lesser jihad) was portrayed as the bigger and the true *jihad* vis-à-vis *jihad-i-akbar* (bigger *jihad*). The latter was thus forgotten and people started believing that probably the militant *jihad* (lesser *jihad*) is actually the only, true and worthy concept of Islam. Due to this kind of world politics and cold war strategies the images of Pakhtuns and Islam suffered a lot because the world started believing that Islam, Pakhtuns, and violence are inseparable. This is very unfortunate because Pakhtuns and Islam both have true messengers of peace and non-violence. Pakhtuns not only have a true non-violent Prophet, Hazrat Muhammad [PBUH] but also have Ba'acha Khan as their national leader who preached and practiced non-violence. One of many titles of Hazrat Muhammad [PBUH] are "*Rahmatul-lil-A'alameen*" (Peace for the entire Universe), who, while facing the violence of the people of Ta'if [The Prophet was so ruthlessly injured by the people during a visit that he profusely bled and his feet in the shoes were submerged in his own blood] refused to curse them for his personal sufferings.

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**End Notes:**

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<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> Pyarelal, *Thrown to the Wolves: Abdul Ghaffar* (Calcutta: Eastlight Book House, 1966), 27.

<sup>iv</sup> Subroto Roy.

<sup>v</sup> D. G. Tendulkar, *Abdul Ghaffar Khan: Faith is a Battle* (Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, 1967), 17-18.

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vii</sup> Abdul Ghaffar Khan, *Zama Zhwand au Jaddo Jehad (Pashto)* (Kabul, 1983).

<sup>viii</sup> Sid, "Abdul Ghaffar Khan" *Everything2*, <<http://everything2.com/title/Abdul+Ghaffar+Khan>> 30.12.2010.

<sup>ix</sup> Amitabh Pal, "A Pacifist Uncovered", *The Progressive*, <<http://www.progressive.org/0901/pa10202.html>> 30.12.2010 & Thomas Michel, "Abdul Ghaffar Khan: Apostle of Non-Violence", *Thomas Michel official website*, <<http://www.thomasmichel.us/apostle-nonviolence.html>> 30.12.2010.

<sup>x</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xi</sup> Mukulika Banerjee, *The Pathan Unarmed* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 146.

<sup>xii</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>xiii</sup> Amitabh Pal.

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- <sup>xiv</sup> Eknath Waswaran, *Badshah Khan: A Man to Match His Mountains* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1999), 13.
- <sup>xv</sup> *Ibid.*
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- <sup>xix</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.
- <sup>xx</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.
- <sup>xxi</sup> *Ibid.*, 150-151.
- <sup>xxii</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>xxiv</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>xxv</sup> Prof. Dr. Mairj ul Islam Zia, former, Director, Sheikh Zayed Islamic Centre & Chairman, Department of Isamiyat, University of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa, Pakistan, interview by author, hand-written, 8 February 2010.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Thomas Michel.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Ishtiaq Ahmad, "Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Islam and non-violence", *DailyTimes on line*, 26 January 2010, <[http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010/01/26/story\\_26-1-2010\\_pg3\\_2](http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010/01/26/story_26-1-2010_pg3_2)> 30.12.2010 & Mazhar-ul-Haq, *A Short History of Islam* (Lahore: Bookland, 2004),
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- <sup>xxix</sup> Zalan Moomand, "Not Just Another Preacher", *Baacha Khan Trust*, Articles, <<http://www.baachakhantrust.org/Not%20Just%20Another%20Preacher.pdf>> 30.12.2010.
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- <sup>xxxi</sup> *Ibid.*
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- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Ishiaq Ahmad.
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- <sup>xxxvi</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> *Ibid.*, 155-156.
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Attar Chand, *India, Pakistan and Afghanistan: A Study of Freedom Struggle and Abdul Ghaffar Khan* (New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 1989), 3.
- <sup>xl</sup> Banerjee, 157.
- <sup>xli</sup> *Ibid.*
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