# *Beyond Gandhi: The Islamic-Pashtun Foundations of Bacha Khan's Nonviolent Resistance (1929-47)*

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**ABSTRACT**

*South Asia today faces a web of interlinked crises—from undemocratic governance and human rights violations to gender inequality, religious strife, environmental degradation, and the persistent threat of terrorism, despite spending over $ 8 trillion by the U.S. and $123 billion by Pakistan, peace remains distant. This article reexamines how historical nonviolent methods may be utilised to counter violence by analysing the Khudai Khidmatgar movement (1929-47), a major yet under-acknowledged nonviolent resistance campaign against British colonial rule led by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan in the Pashtun regions of present-day Pakistan. Through a qualitative historical approach drawing on primary sources—including speeches, pledges, colonial intelligence reports, and Khudai-Khidmatgar pamphlets—and recent decolonial scholarship, the study demonstrates*

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*that Bacha Khan articulated an indigenous Islamic and Pashtun philosophy of nonviolence independent of but parallel to Gandhian Satyagraha. The article analyses the ideological foundations, organizational structures, mobilization strategies, and state repression that shaped the movement, as well as its transformative impact on Pashtun society, including unprecedented female participation and disciplined civil resistance during episodes such as the QissaKhwani massacre. Revisiting the tradition of Bacha Khan not only challenges enduring stereotypes of Pashtuns as inherently violent but also offers a culturally rooted model of nonviolent action with relevance for contemporary Pakistan, where extremism continues to pose profound challenges. By foregrounding this Muslim-led experiment in ethnically grounded resistance, the article highlights the enduring potential of nonviolence as a strategy for justice, dignity, and sustainable peace.*

## Introduction

According to the Global Peace Index Report 2016, global wars and conflicts drained around $13.6 trillion in 2014[1] alone. The ISPR confirms[2] Pakistan, too, has paid a heavy economic price; nearly $106.9 billion has been consumed in combating the waves of violence arising from this war, yet the desired environment of peace is still elusive, and a sense of insecurity continues to surround the nation. Thus, violence and warfare have never proved to be the path for durable peace; rather, they ignite further hostility and deepen the already burning conflicts.[3] The record of human civilization has repeatedly shown that destruction initiated under the banner of protection or security has never brought the

1 *https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/06/the-world-continues-to-spend-enormous-amounts-on-violence-and-little-on-buildingpeace/?utm_content=buffer91471&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer* (accessed 6 January 2025)

2 *http://www.dawn.com/news/1281352* (accessed on 6 January 2025)

3 David Cortright, *Gandhi and Beyond: Nonviolence for a New Political Age* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 6]

desired results.[4] Contrary to this, nonviolent resistance or civil resistance[5] has presented humanity with workable alternatives, particularly when confronting oppressive or authoritarian regimes,[6] such as Hitler's Germany, Pinochet's Chile, Zia-ul-Haq's Pakistan, Soviet Communism in Eastern Europe, and Gandhi's anti-colonial Quit India Movement. Hence, this paper attempts to highlight another significant nonviolent anti-colonial struggle against the British Empire that emerged in the region now known as Khyber

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4 Cortright, *Gandhi and Beyond,* 6

5 Gene Sharp defines nonviolent resistance as a powerful way for people to fight for their rights, freedom, justice, and self-determination—without the use of violence.

Nonviolence is seen as an effort to influence, and a typology of influence techniques is developed, based on a simple model of how human actions are decided upon. This typology has as its main axis a distinction between positive and negative techniques of influence, i.e., the distinction between techniques that facilitate the execution of positive actions and techniques that impede the execution of negative actions. Nonviolence is then defined in a negative and a positive sense: negative nonviolence would include all possible techniques of influence short of 'deprivation of biological health' (called violence in the narrow sense), and positive nonviolence would exclude all negative techniques of influence (called violence in the broad sense). (Johan Galtung, "On the Meaning of Nonviolence", *Journal of Peace Research,* 2, no.3 (1965): 228-256]

Gandhi, who introduced nonviolent resistance for political purposes, coined the terminology called *Satyagrah.* The principle called Satyagraha came into being before that name was invented. [...] But I could not for the life of me find out a new name and therefore offered a nominal prize through Indian Opinion to the reader who made the best suggestion on the subject. As a result, Maganlal Gandhi coined the word 'Satyagraha' (Sat=truth, Agraha=firmness) and won the prize, but to make it clearer, I changed the word to 'Satyagraha', which has since become current in Gujrati as a designation for the struggle. (Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 318-9]

6 Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan. *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*. (Columbia University Press, 2011)

*http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/chen15682*

Pakhtunkhwa (KP), unfortunately labeled as one of the 'violent' societies of the world. This movement was organized under the platform of Khudai-Khidmatgar and championed by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, alias Bacha Khan. Although Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence has been extensively studied, the significance of the *KhudaiKhidmatgar* movement has received less attention in global historiography. This article argues that Bacha Khan developed an indigenous Islamic and Pashtun philosophy of nonviolence that complicates existing narratives of colonial resistance.

## Historiography and Recent Decolonial Scholarship

Recent scholarship has shifted from portraying Khudai Khidmatgar chiefly as a regional offshoot of Gandhian satyagraha toward more nuanced, decolonial readings that foreground indigenous moral worlds, archival silences, and processes of erasure. Mukulika Banerjee's foundational ethnographic study, "The Pathan Unarmed," emphasized memory, subalternity, and the double marginalization of Pashtun nonviolent actors—both within Indian nationalist narratives and in colonial knowledge-production. [7] More recent doctoral and peer-reviewed work expands this corrective. Safoora Arbab's[8] dissertation and related articles read *KhudaiKhidmatgar* through a postcolonial and affective lens, highlighting how oral archives, movement rituals, and local archives complicate archival silences produced by colonial policing and later state suppression.

Contemporary Pakistan-based scholarship and regional analyses [9] have traced how the movement's affiliation

7 Makulika Banerjee, *The Pathan Unarmed: Opposition and Memory in the Northwest Frontier,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)

8 Safoora Arbab, *The Ecstasy and Anarchy of Nonviolence: The KhudaiKhidmatgar Resistance in the North-West Frontier of British India,* (PhD Thesis: University of Los Angeles, Unpublished, 2019)

9 Azmat Ullah, Rabia Hayat, and Fahim Ullah Khan, "KhudaiKhidmatgars' Resistance against Colonial Rule and its

choices, provincial politics, and the post-Partition state contributed to its marginalisation from official national historiography—what decolonial scholars call 'agnotology' or the deliberate manufacture of ignorance about certain anticolonial actors. Recent articles on counter-terrorism and decolonial approaches to peacebuilding argue that reinserting *KhudaiKhidmatgar* into national and transnational histories corrects the stereotyped framing of Pashtuns as inherently violent and demonstrates how culturally embedded nonviolence challenges both colonial and postcolonial securitising narratives. Work on "Pashtun stereotyping and the marginalisation of non-violent movements", [10] connects these historiographical interventions to contemporary policy debates.

Methodologically, this decolonial turn encourages researchers to diversify their sources—incorporating oral histories, *KhudaiKhidmatgar* pamphlets, local newspapers, police files, and family archives—to recuperate suppressed voices and to interrogate how state records themselves contributed to the movement's erasure. This approach aligns with broader trends in South Asian history that emphasize subaltern agency, affective memory, and the politics of archival recovery.

## Research Methodology

This article employs a qualitative historical research design to revisit the development, strategies, and ideological foundations of the *KhudaiKhidmatgar* Movement. The purpose is interpretive and analytical: to assess how a predominantly Pashtun Muslim community institutionalised nonviolence against British colonial rule and how those lessons may inform contemporary peace building. The

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Search for Affiliation" *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review*, 5, No. 2, (July-December 2021): 661-672]

10 Farooq Yousaf, "Pashtun stereotyping and the marginalisation of non-violent movements in post-9/11 Pakistan", in the Book, *Global CounterTerrorism: A decolonial Approach*, ed. Sagnik Dutta, Tahir Abbas, Sylvia I. Bergh, (Manchester University Press, 2025), Ch.2.

primary and secondary sources have been systematically examined to reconstruct the movement's political and social history.

The primary sources include documented speeches, pledges, and oaths authored by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, as well as contemporaneous accounts of key events such as the *QissaKhwani* massacre and British colonial policies affecting the *KhudaiKhidmatgaran*. Secondary sources include scholarly monographs, journal articles, and historiographical debates on nonviolent anti-colonial resistance and Pashtun social reform movements. These provide theoretical insight into the ideological positioning of the movement within wider South Asian anticolonial networks. The article uses a thematic and comparative analytical approach structured around ideological origins, mobilisation strategies, state repression, and movement resilience. A historiographical analysis contrasts the British colonial narratives with local and scholarly interpretations, assessing how *KhudaiKhidmatgar's* pacifism has been remembered, marginalised, or politicised over time.

## Conceptual Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study draws on key frameworks of nonviolent resistance and peace research. Johan Galtung's theory of positive peace emphasises that sustainable peace requires justice and the transformation of structural violence. The *KhudaiKhidmatgar* movement is assessed as an early expression of this principle in a Muslim and Pashtun context. Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan's [11] strategic logic of nonviolent conflict theory supports the argument that disciplined nonviolent resistance can be more effective than armed struggle in achieving political goals, making the KK movement a relevant historical case for modern counter-extremism strategies. Gene Sharp's[12] typology of nonviolent methods is used to interpret

11 Chenoweth and J. Stephan. *Why Civil Resistance Works.*

12 Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action,* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973)

the tactics of the *KhudaiKhidmatgar,* such as noncooperation, civil disobedience, and parallel institution-building within village structures.

By linking historical evidence with peace theory, the study contributes to contemporary scholarship on culturally embedded nonviolence and its lessons for counter-extremism and social transformation in Pakistan today.

## Nonviolent Movements in India

It is wrongly said that the demands of Indians for independence and the mobilisation of masses against the British rule were achieved by the main political organisations. Nonviolent resistance played a pivotal role in securing the independence of India in 1947. In this long struggle against the Raj, the moral foundations of nonviolence were not left as mere ideas; rather, they were practically demonstrated throughout the entire anti-colonial phase. In this regard, two leading personalities stand prominent in the history of India who mobilised the masses across the length and breadth of the country—Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

Although the philosophy of nonviolence did not originate within the territorial boundaries of India, it was an Indian, while in South Africa, who transformed it into an organised instrument of political resistance. Gandhi, who was born in Kathiawar, India, later emerged as the founder of civil resistance for political change. It could not be imagined then that a soft-spoken individual who initially remained unsuccessful in his own land would set a new direction for political dissent in the world. Fischer[13] mentions that a minor incident of racial discrimination in a reserved train compartment became the point of departure, which eventually led Gandhi to lead thousands for the rest of his life.

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13 Louis Fischer, Gandhi: *His Life and Message for the World* (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 1982)

The Khilafat Movement (1919-24), the Bardoli March (1928), the Salt March (1930), and numerous smaller movements under the banner of Civil Disobedience and Quit India (1930-47) were those significant demonstrations which not only made the Indian people conscious of their rights but also paved the way for the freedom of India from British colonial rule through nonviolent means.

It is amidst all such movements, which were spearheaded by a world-famous figure, that another nonviolent initiative began far away in the Northwestern Province—now a part of Pakistan since the exit of the British from the Indian sub-continent in 1947. It emerged from a small village, Utmanzai, Peshawar, in 1910, thousands of miles away from Gandhi's birthplace. Initially, it was an education and social reform movement. This movement was led by a tall, strongly built man named Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan. He is also known as Bacha Khan—a leader whose philosophy emerged from Pashtun society's own reformist impulses, not merely as an extension of Gandhian thought. He was born in 1890 in the village of Utmanzai, situated in the district of Mardan. This movement was later known as *Khudai Khidmatgar*, which was established in 1929 after passing through multiple phases.

## Emergence of *Khudai Khidmatgaran* (the Servants of God)

The current Khyber-Pukhtoonkhwa, where the 'War on Terror' is being fought today, is the birthplace of *Khudai Khidmatgaran* (KK). Including the tribal belt, it is said that the Taliban and leaders of 'Al-Qaeda' have their hideouts in this region. The Council on Foreign Relations (2008) declared that the Bush administration had already spent $200 billion[14] in the Afghanistan war by October 2007, yet the results remained fruitless. This same region had already been the battleground in 1979-87, when the United States, alongside Pakistan and other allies, supported the "Mujahedin" against

14 *http://www.cfr.org/publication/15404/#2*

the Soviet Union in the name of protecting Islam from Communism. Today, the same territory is framed as a theatre where violence is used to 'save humanity' from so-called Islamic extremism. Yet if we look deeper into history, we see a stark contrast: in the same region, Bacha Khan had once led a struggle that demanded no money, involved no killing, and broke with the popular stereotype of Pashtuns as naturally violent. As William Crook[15] observed, Pathans were described as a nation of warriors who took pride in extending their feuds and found honour in revenge. Bacha Khan subverted that perception by grounding his struggle in Islamic ethics, demonstrating to the world a very different understanding of the religion, Islam.

Although Ghaffar Khan initiated his civil resistance movement, known as the *Khudai Khidmatgar*, Gandhi was leading a similar movement in the other part of the country. Still, the rational and epistemological grounds and the followers were distinct. The biographer Makulika Banerjee defined that KK's beliefs were not derived from the principles of the Pashtun tribal code (*Pashtunwali)* only, but he also introduced the Islamic concept of non-violence. Benerjee[16] quoted Ghaffar Khan's thoughts regarding the establishment of the movement and stated that he wanted to establish a group of people who would be more brave and stronger than the police and army, and nothing could challenge their weapon of bravery, and that was the weapon of the Prophet. However, many were unaware of that weapon, and that weapon was righteousness and patience. [17] *Ahimsa* of Gandhi, though, was the outlook of the *Khidmatgaran,* yet his beliefs and actions to run the movement were of his own, which was crafted independently through the Islamic ethics

15 Crook, William, *The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Province and Oudh*. (Calcutta: Government Printing Press India, 1896).

16 Benerjee, *The Pathan Unarmed, 56-59.*

17 Robert C. Johansen, "Radical Islam and Nonviolence: A Case Study of Religious Empowerment and Constraint Among Pasthuns" *Journal of Peace Research,* 34. no.1 (February 1997): 58.

and *Pashtunwali.* Primary documentation, such as his own speeches, diaries, and *Khudai Khidmatgar* pamphlets, demonstrates the evolution of a localized philosophy before sustained collaboration with Gandhi. Undoubtedly, it was Gandhi who introduced nonviolent mechanisms to achieve political objectives in the modern political system.[18] He is, therefore, recognised as the architect of nonviolent campaigns. Resultantly, whoever led his/her people on the path of nonviolence, that person is associated with Gandhi's path. Yet Ghaffar Khan is widely known in history as a "Frontier Gandhi (*Sarhadi* Gandhi)". J. S. Bright, who was the contemporary biographer of Ghaffar Khan, justified the nonviolent philosophy of Ghaffar Khan by stating that he arrived at that view on his own. Rather, his learning and teaching of nonviolence were from a higher level of spirituality. Comparing Shelley and Keats, he tagged Ghaffar Khan Shelley, who came from heaven to earth, while Gandhi travelled from earth to heaven like Keats. He was rather objecting by calling Ghaffar Khan the *Sarhadi* Gandhi. "If we judge a person by spiritual qualities, Mahatma Gandhi should rather be called the Indian Khan than Ghaffar Khan the Frontier Gandhi: true, there the matter ends."[19]

Judith Butler and George H. Mead provide theoretical support to the understanding of nonviolent activism and the reformation of Ghaffar Khan by their theory of self-consciousness against violence. Butler defines the emergence of 'ethics of nonviolence' in a person through the understanding of the precariousness of life and mutual dependency.[20] Likewise, George's theory of 'self', where

18 Cortright, *Gandhi and Beyond,* 6.

19 J.S. Bright, quoted by Syed Wiqar Ali Shah, *Abdul Ghaffar Khan,* (Unpublished), 14.

*http://www.baachakhantrust.org/AbdulGhaffarKhan.pdf* (consulted in August 2025)

20 Judith Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence: An Ethico-Political Bind.* (London: Verso, 2020)

moral self-awareness takes the lead in guiding lives.[21] Refused to join the Commission Guides, which was the most respected force's job in the Royal British army in 1906, he established an *azad* (open) school in Utmanzai (his hometown) in 1910, and his involvement in the reformist program of Haji Abdul Wahid Sahib of Turangzai in 1911 demonstrated his awareness of the nonviolent way back before his meetup with Gandhi. His self-conscious decision provides one of the most influential contemporary philosophical justifications for his independent adoption of nonviolence into his and his organisation's philosophy and actions. That is how he was successful in converting the culturally and tribally 'violent' nation into a nonviolent population. Later, that attitude and behaviour were magnificently displayed in a series of protests in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s in Peshawar and beyond against British colonial rule.

Defeating his opponents, the British, by using cannons and guns was not his force; rather, he adopted a more powerful force. The power of his self-consciousness and awareness of nonviolence prompted him to spread the learning to a wider social action by reforming his Pashtun society. Resultantly, he established *Anjuman-i-Islahi* Afghan (Organisation of Reforming Pashtuns) in 1921.[22] That organisation was renamed *Khudai Khidmatgar* in 1929, and the followers of the organisation were called *Khudai Khidmatgaran.* The main goal of the organisation was to fight for the rights of the people in the region through peaceful means against colonial rule. He called it an army with the proper uniform, training, and the post-training oath whose

21 George Herbert Mead. *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist.* Edited by Charles W. Morris. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934)

22 For details: Muhammad Sohail, and Muhammad Idris, 'Qissa Khani Massacre and its Effects on the Role of Anjuman-i-IslahulAfaghina (1921-1946)', *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture,* XXXIX, no.1, 2018.

objective was to battle without guns.[23] The uniformed force was trained to use nonviolent methods to accomplish their social, economic, and political rights. Borrowing the codes of ethics from the religion of Islam and the *Pashtunwali*, he inspired his followers to fight against injustice and suppression by nonviolent means. He highlighted the life and character of Prophet Muhammad for his love for all humanity.

Following the structure of a traditional army, his main volunteers were the youth who had finished their early education. These volunteers had to go through proper training after the classical army's recruitment process. However, the curriculum of these recruits was different from that of the conventional forces. They were trained in enhancing their patience and tolerance after putting them through various hardships. Such personality skills were required to be calm before any type of violence by their opponents. They were trained physically and psychologically to enhance their nonviolent capacity. After that hardship and personal growth, the cadets would earn conventional titles and ranks such as general, captain, and lieutenant. Likewise, these cadets had to take an oath to adhere to that discipline and beliefs, which they learnt throughout their training.

The oath of these cadets suggests that it was the first modern world's trained nonviolent force. Bacha Khan himself and his biographers quoted the oath word-for-word[24] where

23 Johansen, Radical Islam and Nonviolence, 58.

24 I put forth my name in honesty and truthfulness to become a true Servant of God. I will sacrifice my wealth, life, and comfort for the liberty of my nation and people. I will never be a party to factions, hatred, or jealousy with my people and will side with the oppressed against the oppressor. I will not become a member of any other rival organisation, nor will I serve in the army. I will faithfully obey the illegitimate orders of all my officers all the time. I will live in accordance with the principles of non-violence [*Adam Tashadud*]. I will serve all God's creatures alike, and my object shall be the attainment of the freedom of my country and my religion. I will always see to it that I do what is right and good. I will never desire any

the highest recognition was to be the 'Servant of God', and all their belongings in the form of wealth, comfort, and liberty were served for their people and the nation. They were asked to refrain from building any social evils such as distrust, odium, and division in their ranks and file as well as in society. Believing in the life hereafter as defined in the religion of Islam, the awards and rewards for their services to humanity were receiving the pleasure of Allah only. Likewise, the promises such as refraining from violence and revenge, forgiveness, building social bonding in society, and living a modest life strengthened the practical form of the highest value of nonviolence in society without claiming any reward against these services.[25]

After the struggle of a decade in the 1940s, the number of these servants of God *(Khudai Khidmatgaran)* reached more than 100,000. Bacha Khan spread this message within his province of North-Western Frontier Province (renamed to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa-KP in 2018) and beyond by establishing offices there. It is after such a long struggle as a reformist within his society, he associated himself with the idea of civil disobedience and the non-cooperation movement against the British colonialism, of Gandhi, and took his message to the rest of India besides Gandhi. After observing the mechanism of Bacha Khan's practice of nonviolence and its philosophy in the 1930s, Gandhi explained the meaning of fighting by stating that the heroic adoption of *ahimsa*, despite having the features of violent fighters, came from the "[Bacha] Khan's *Khudai Khidmatgaran",* and it was what he was seeking in India.[26]

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reward or whatever for my service. All my efforts shall be to please God, and not for any show or gain. Johansen, Radical Islam and Nonviolence, 59.

25 Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, *My Life and Struggle: The Autobiography of Badshah Khan* (Delhi: Hind Pocket Books, 1969), 97.

26 Timothy Flinders, "The Good Fight---Badshah Khan, the Frontier Gandhi" in the book by design: Nonviolence in Theory and Practice, ed. Robert L. Holmes and Barry L. Gan. (Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1990), 188.

Being unpaid yet providing the greater services of that nonviolent force can also be associated with the concept of 'Greater *Jihad'* - the *Jihad-al-Nafs* (internal struggle).[27] The hardship of the training concentrated on fighting against their worldly desires, egos, lust, arrogance, greed, and intolerance. The oath of these soldiers, as well as the life of Bacha Khan, depicts these esteemed personal characteristics. Another prominent and exceptional feature of the movement was the role of women in society. At that time (and even today), the idea of allowing women to participate outside the household was practically unthinkable for the people of these tribes. Yet he made it visible that women actively took part in his army and played a successful role side by side with men. He also spoke publicly about equal rights for women with reference to Islamic teachings: "In the Holy Quran," he told women, "You have an equal share with men. You are today oppressed because we men have ignored the commands of God and the Prophet. Today, we are the followers of custom, and we oppress you."[28]

In the history of the movement, one incident flourishes and popularises the struggle on a larger scale. So, it was in the life of the *Khudai Khidmatgar,* remembered as the *Qissa Khwani Bazar* incident. The anecdote of the incident was penned down that in response to the Indian National Congress's call for non-cooperation and civil disobedience in 1929, Bacha Khan took the lead to propagate the message in his part of India. On the invitation of Bacha Khan, the congressmen intended to come to KP province to strengthen their campaign of Independence, however, the British police arrested them at the entrance point of the province. The *Khudai Khidmatgaran* started protesting the illegal act of their arrest. But on April 23, 1930, the British police opened fire on the unarmed protestors, who were gathered at *Qissa*

27 For detail meaning of Jihad in Islam, John L. Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam and What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

28 Johansen, *Radical Islam and Nonviolence,* 61.

*Khwani Bazar,* Peshawar. Bacha Khan, who was in his village, Utmanzai, for a school meeting at that time, left for Peshawar as he heard of the violent incident. Nevertheless, he was unable to reach the Bazar but was arrested by the police. The news of the arrest of Bacha Khan spread like fire in the area, which led to the more powerful protests. But the British police tried to stop the protestors with iron hands. That resulted in the deaths of 200 protestors [29]. That massacre put the unarmed protestors' struggle vis-à-vis *KhudaiKhidmatgaran* on the national and international media. Even Allah Bakhsh Yousfi, one of the major critics of Ghaffar Khan, mentioned that the event elevated KK from a provincial effort into a popular movement, and elevated Ghaffar Khan into a National Leader. Before the massacre, the number of KK members was a little more than 1,000, but it increased to 25,000 in the following year after QissaKhwani.[30]

The British, alarmed by the discipline and rising influence of the *KhudaiKhidmatgaran*, launched a defamation campaign against the movement and arrested Ghaffar Khan. They depicted the group's red uniforms as symbols of communism —an ideology they claimed was anti-Islam—and used pro-government religious leaders to turn Muslims against Ghaffar Khan by labeling him a Hindu ally and an enemy of the faith. Ghaffar Khan explained that choosing red shirts for his unarmed force was simply because the clothes were cheap and readily available. In response, the British employed various tactics—including violence—to undermine the movement. During the civil disobedience campaign, the *Khudai Khidmatgars* boycotted foreign goods, refused to pay taxes, and urged revenue officials to resign. The government reacted harshly, enforcing the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR 1901), arresting and even executing members.

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29 Benerjee, *The Pathan Unarmed,* 56. (Benerjee copied the numbers from the Peshawar Enquiry Committee's report which was appointed by the Indian National Congress).

30 Allah Bakhsh Yousafi, *Sarhad aur Jido-Jehad I Azadi* (Karachi: Nafees Academy, 1968).

Despite this oppression, the movement's popularity grew among the people and local authorities.

Yousafi claims the popularity of Bacha Khan in the region happened after that massacre. However, that claim sounds weak as the news of his arrest gathered more protestors at the *Qissa Khwani* square, which were dealt with by armoured vehicles of the British police. The nonviolent civil resisters were defamed by associating violence with them; however, that claim is so feeble that not a single, but one regime's officials were killed in the massacre. In response to the law-and-order situation after that massacre and the growing popularity of Bacha Khan, the British government had to promulgate Martial Law in the province of KP and issued orders of restriction to any member of the Indian National Congress in the province.[31]

Despite one of the most violent massacres of the British colonial rule in India, the *Qissa Khwani* Square massacre was unable to attract significant historians to highlight the atrocities of the British in that region and how the Pashtuns fought nonviolently and valiantly against that repression. Likewise, regional discrimination was visible when the historiography of the *Qissa Khwani* incident was compared with the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. The latter was highlighted and researched more, which also demonstrates the regional discrimination towards the Pashtun province. Shah and Banerjee, however, did justice to carry the significant primary references to the event.

On the joining of the Indian National Congress (INC) by Bacha Khan and his volunteer force, Banerjee and Shah[32] claim that the All India Muslim League refused Bacha Khan to provide a national platform after such a horrific clampdown on his nonviolent army and its structure in the province, which left him no other option but to join hands

31 Benerjee, *The Pathan Unarmed,* 59.

32 Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah, 'Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the KhudaiKhidmatgars, Congress and the Partition of India', *Pakistan Vision,* (8, no. 2), 102

with the INC on August 9, 1931.[33] So that their voices could be heard at the national level and save their skins from the British usurpation. But the firm believer of nonviolence, whose philosophy and practice were guided by the religious and ethnic scriptures, separated his path from following the decision of the INC after the Poona Offer in September 1939, which conditionally agreed to support the British in their Second World War effort. Bacha Khan stated, "We have been condemning war and their horrors, and now is the time to prove our sincerity and resist all attempts to be dragged into any wicked combination for that purpose."[34] Despite his resignation from INC's CWC in 1939, and his party's pledge of loyalty to the newly created State of Pakistan in their 3-4 September 1047 meeting,[35] KK and Bacha Khan faced more sufferings after August 14, 1947 at the hands of the leaders of the Muslim League.[36] As a result, Pakistani history has largely failed to acknowledge Ghaffar Khan and the significant legacy of the KhudaiKhidmatgaran movement. Even so, Ghaffar Khan remained highly influential in his province.

## Conclusion

As Gandhi said, "I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills. The history of the *KhudaiKhidmatgar* movement, therefore, demonstrates that nonviolence in South Asia is not solely a derivative of Gandhian philosophy but has powerful indigenous roots in Islamic ethical traditions and Pashtun social reform. The movement's ability to mobilize a so-called "martial race" into a disciplined nonviolent force challenges colonial stereotypes and reveals a transformative re-interpretation of *Pashtunwali*—placing service, forgiveness, and collective responsibility above revenge and violent honour.

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33 Shah, 'Abdul Ghaffar Khan', 101.

34 Shah, 'Abdul Ghaffar Khan', 102.

35 Shah, 'Abdul Ghaffar Khan', 108-9.

36 Benerjee, *The Pathan Unarmed,* 68-71.

With the rise of religious extremism as a global threat following the decline of communism, the example of a Muslim leader like Ghaffar Khan—who built his movement on Islamic principles—remains highly relevant, especially for the troubled tribal areas of Pakistan. He famously stated that non-violence was deeply rooted in Islam, recalling the Prophet's example in Mecca and emphasising that Islam rests on *amal, yakeen, mohabbat* (action, faith, and love). His movement demonstrated how an entire society with a history of conflict could be guided toward peaceful resistance. Through dedication and moral conviction, he showed that violence is never a nation's only path; what people need is principled leadership. In 1896, William Crook described Pashtuns as inherently violent and vengeful. Yet events like the QissaKhwani Bazaar massacre proved how misguided such views were: despite facing brutal British aggression, the same Pashtuns chose disciplined non-violence over retaliation, confronting colonial oppression with remarkable courage and restraint.

Yet, despite its monumental scale, its thousands of martyrs, and its deep influence on anti-colonial nationalism, the *KhudaiKhidmatgaran* remains marginalized within Pakistan's official historiography. Its affiliation with the Indian National Congress, as well as post-Partition political tensions, contributed to its erasure from state narratives. As a result, generations have grown up unaware that one of the most significant Muslim-led experiments in nonviolent resistance emerged from the very region now stereotyped as inherently violent. The inclusion of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan's history in Pakistan's national narrative, even as an opposition leader, would certainly enrich the country's historical diversity.

Reexamining this history is therefore not only an exercise in academic recovery but a vital contribution to contemporary peace discourse. The *KhudaiKhidmatgar* model offers important lessons: that nonviolence can be culturally grounded, religiously authentic, and socially transformative—even under intense repression. Placing this movement within

South Asian and global histories of nonviolent struggle enriches our understanding of how oppressed communities can resist domination without compromising their ethical principles. Similarly, in an age where extremism has distorted global perceptions of Islam and the Pashtuns, the example of Abdul Ghaffar Khan reminds us that the traditions of peace, dignity, and justice are deeply embedded within the followers of these scripts. Recognizing and re-centering this legacy in Pakistan's public memory could contribute to a more inclusive national narrative—and inspire future movements committed to peace, human rights, and democratic empowerment. These pledges and oaths, preserved in the *KhudaiKhidmatgar* archives and colonial intelligence records, serve as important primary sources demonstrating the Islamic and Pashtun moral vocabularies through which nonviolence was adapted.