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# **Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the Khudai Khidmatgars, Congress and the Partition of India**

\_\_\_\_\_ Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah  
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Although a few studies<sup>1</sup> are available on the N-WFP politics, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, and the Khudai Khidmatgars, they are primarily centred on Abdul Ghaffar Khan (also popularly known as Bacha Khan), and his relations with the Indian National Congress (INC). In this paper, an attempt has been made to study and analyse the Khudai Khidmatgar Movement, and Bacha Khan's role in the freedom movement, especially in the revival of Pashtoon nationalism, and the adoption of non-violence in the Pashtoon society. The present study is different from others mainly because primary source material has been utilised to support the analysis.

The North-West Frontier Province (N-WFP) has played a significant role in the shaping and re-shaping of the Indian history. Its crucial strategic location made it not only the frontier of India but also an international frontier of the first importance from the military point of view for the whole British empire. The British came late to the N-WFP because it was far away from their points of early contacts with the subcontinent, i.e. Bengal, Madras and Bombay. As the region is situated on the 'highway of conquest', the majority of the earlier invaders had made their way into the Indian subcontinent through this area. Throughout the medieval period, until the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the area remained part of the Muslim empires of north India and Afghanistan. The internal feuds between the Pashtoons provided Ranjeet Singh, the Sikh ruler of the Punjab, with

the opportunity to occupy Peshawar. However, in 1849, after the defeat of Sikhs and the annexation of the Punjab, the British took over N-WFP as part of the Sikh dominion. The region remained with the Punjab till 1901, when Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy of India, separated the five districts of Hazara, Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan, and joining them to five agencies namely Malakand, Khyber, Kurram, North and South Waziristan, and formed a separate province called the North-West Frontier Province of India.<sup>2</sup>

As stated earlier, because of its distinctive character, the province was treated by the British in a 'special way'. Security considerations were given priority over social, economic and political reforms. Unlike other provinces of British India, where reforms were introduced, the N-WFP was neglected and intentionally governed through 'Special Ordinances', Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) being one amongst them. Interestingly, after the departure of the British from the subcontinent, still this draconian law continued to exist in the tribal areas of the N-WFP. The main aim of the colonial government in impeding the pace of reforms was to discourage the local inhabitants from undermining the status quo for their province.<sup>3</sup>

### **Abdul Ghaffar Khan's Early Years**

Abdul Ghaffar Khan was born in 1890 at Utmanzai (Charsadda) district Peshawar. His father Bahram Khan was a well-to-do landowner of Mohammadzai clan. According to the then popular tradition, Ghaffar Khan was sent to the local mosque to take early lessons in the Holy Quran. The Pashtoos have great respect for religious education and majority of them send their children to mosques. There was hardly any government schools in the rural areas and thus, in education, the N-WFP was one of the most backward areas in British India. Moreover, unlike the state patronage of Ulema in other parts of the subcontinent, in the N-WFP

the Ulema remained at loggerheads with the establishment, indeed preoccupied with *jihad* to get rid of the British rulers in that part of South Asia.

When Abdul Ghaffar Khan finished his schooling at the village mosque, he was sent to the Municipal Board High School at Peshawar. He had his preliminary education there and soon after joined the Edwardes Memorial Mission High School at Peshawar. Rev. E. F. E. Wigram, the school headmaster had a profound effect on young Ghaffar Khan. Meanwhile, his elder brother, Khan Sahib went to Bombay to join a medical college. Like many other children of elite families, Abdul Ghaffar Khan was also persuaded to apply for a Commission in the army. During the course of his matriculation examination, he was informed that he had been granted a Commission in the army and was ordered to proceed immediately to Mardan, the headquarters of the Guides. He left the examination incomplete and, as he was about to join the army, an incident occurred which changed his whole outlook of joining army or indeed the government service.<sup>4</sup> He decided to continue his studies. He went to Campbellpur (now Attock), which had a reputation for hosting a good institution. But he did not stay there long enough.

After Campbellpur, he went to Qadian, attracted by the fame of Hakim Noor-ud-Din of Qadian, the second 'khalifa' of the Ahmadiyya. Not satisfied with his stay at Qadian, he next went to Aligarh where he received his father's letter asking him to return home. He intended to send him to England to join his brother, Khan Sahib, who had been there since February 1909 for higher medical education. All the arrangements were complete when his old mother could not allow him to go to leave. She felt that she had already lost her elder son and in no way was she going to say good-bye to the younger one as well. She believed that whoever went abroad, particularly to England, never came back.<sup>5</sup> Thus, Abdul Ghaffar Khan had to give up his proposed trip to

England. Indeed, he decided to serve the people of the Frontier, who were backward educationally and spent their life in faction-feuds and many other vices then prevailing in the Pashtoon society. He was convinced that Pashtoos must be educated, reformed and organised.

Abdul Ghaffar Khan commenced his social activities as an educationist and came into close contact with another social reformer of the area, Haji Fazli Wahid, popularly known as the Haji of Turangzai. Their combined efforts resulted in the opening of educational institutions called the Dar ul Ulum at Utmanzai and Gaddar (Mardan) in 1910. Apart from religious education, students were imparted the concept of patriotism. No details are available about the exact number of these Madrassas or the number of students and teachers and the source of their income.<sup>6</sup> The two were joined by some other Pashtoon intellectuals, particularly Maulvi Fazl-i-Rabi, Maulvi Taj Mohammad, Fazal Mahmood Makhfi and Abdul Aziz, most of whom were the graduates of Deoband.<sup>7</sup> Abdul Ghaffar Khan was also in touch with Mahmood Hasan, the chief divine at Deoband and his pupil Ubaidullah Sindhi, who played a leading part in anti-British movements. They were then planning the establishment of an anti-British centre, deep inside the tribal area, but it did not materialise for the time being.<sup>8</sup>

### **Abdul Ghaffar Khan Enters Politics**

The year 1919 saw India in turmoil; the economic situation had deteriorated; industrial workers were resentful of the working conditions, and the peasants were unhappy over general price-hike. The Muslims were deeply concerned about the treatment meted out to Turkish Caliph by the Allied Powers and the 'nationalists' were agitating over the 'broken promises' made during the course of War. To curb the 'seditious' and revolutionary activities in the country, the Government of India had decided to enforce the Rowlatt Act. It immediately roused a storm of protest.

On 6 April, a successful all-India *hartal* was observed. In the N-WFP, like the rest of India, protest meetings were held against the Rowlatt Act. Abdul Ghaffar Khan held a protest meeting at Utmanzai, attended by more than 50,000 people. In the rural areas of the Frontier, this was the first political occasion when such a large number of people participated to express solidarity on an all-India issue.<sup>9</sup>

The provincial authorities could not remain a silent spectator of anti-British activities in the settled districts of the N-WFP. Abdul Ghaffar Khan was immediately arrested and imprisoned, followed by a punitive fine of Rs. 30,000 upon the villagers of Utmanzai. Over a hundred and fifty notables were kept in confinement as hostages, until the fine was paid.<sup>10</sup> After six months, Ghaffar Khan was released and allowed to join his family.

Already towards the end of 1918, the Khilafat movement had been launched in India. An offshoot of the Khilafat movement was the Hijrat movement. The Ulema declared India as *Dar ul Harb* (Land of War) and advised Muslims to migrate to *Dar ul Islam* (Land of Islam). Afghanistan, the neighbourly Muslim country with whom they had religious, cultural, political and ethnic ties, was deemed to be a safe destination. Amanullah Khan, the anti-British Amir of Afghanistan, offered asylum to the Indian Muslims. Eventually, more than 60,000 Muhajirin took shelter in Afghanistan. As Peshawar was the main city on the way to Afghanistan, it became the hub of the movement. Soon, it became impossible for the Afghan government to facilitate the settlement of these religious zealots in Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup>

### **Anjuman-i-Islah-ul-Afaghana**

Like many other Pashtoons, Abdul Ghaffar Khan also migrated to Afghanistan. The Muhajirin did not achieve their objectives and the Hijrat resulted in failure the reasons of which are outside the scope of the present research. Ghaffar Khan was disappointed with the results of Hijrat.

He realised that migration from India alone was not the solution of their problems. He decided to return to India and organise his people against the illiteracy and social evils then prevailing in Pashtoon society. He was convinced that the British would not allow him to resume his educational activities in the settled districts. Therefore, accompanied by Fazal Mahmood Makhfi, he started a school at Dir. The local inhabitants appreciated their activities and started sending their children to this school. The popularity of the school alarmed the Nawab of Dir, who, supported by the Political Agent, Malakand, decided on a crackdown on their activities. Ghaffar Khan and Makhfi were expelled from the area and the building was demolished.<sup>12</sup>

Appalled at the outcome of their individual efforts, Abdul Ghaffar Khan shifted to his home town Utmanzai. He consulted like-minded Pashtoon social workers and intelligentsia and together they decided to resume their educational and social activities collectively. They also decided to work for the eradication of social evils from Pashtoon society like blood-feuds and factionalism, prevention of crimes and the use of intoxicants. Moreover, they emphasised the importance of creating awareness among the Pashtoons of the benefit of modern education and revival of Pashto language.

To pursue some of these goals and objectives, Abdul Ghaffar Khan found on 1 April 1921, the *Anjuman-i-Islah-ul-Afaghana* (the Society for the Reformation of Afghans) with himself as its President and Mian Ahmad Shah as Secretary. The stated objectives of the Anjuman included: promotion of unity amongst the Pashtoons, eradication of social evils, prevention of lavish spending on social events, encouragement of Pashto language and literature, and creation of 'real love' for Islam among the Pashtoons.<sup>13</sup> On 10 April, 1921, the first branch of *Azad Islamia Madrassa* was opened at Utmanzai, followed by many more branches in different areas of the Peshawar Valley. No accurate figures

are available about the exact number of these schools but a careful study suggests that they were as many as 70. The curriculum included teaching of the Holy Quran and Hadith, Fiqh, Islamic history, Pashto, Mathematics, English and Arabic. Moreover, vocational skills like carpentry, weaving and tailoring were also introduced. As there was no educational institute for higher studies in the province, the students were prepared for the matriculation examination of the Punjab University. On 1 December 1923, the Madrassa was affiliated with Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi. The main source of funding came from the Anjuman members, who contributed enormously to finance the educational activities of the Madrassas. Ghaffar Khan took the initiative by sending his children to the Madrassa followed by his elder brother Dr. Khan Sahib. They were joined by other members of the Anjuman and notables of the area who appreciated Ghaffar Khan's efforts and enrolled their children in these Madrassas. As education was free and the Madrassas were open to all communities, without any prejudice of caste or religion, these educational institutions soon became popular and the number of students increased from 140 to 300.<sup>14</sup>

During late 1921, Ghaffar Khan was invited by the faction-ridden provincial Khilafat Committee at Peshawar to become its President to which he agreed.<sup>15</sup> He undertook a whirlwind tour of the province and established Khilafat Committees in rural areas. During his tour, he delivered speeches and emphasised the need of getting rid of British imperialism in South Asia. The government decided to restrain his 'objectionable activities' and as a result Ghaffar Khan was arrested on 17 December 1921 and sentenced to three years rigorous imprisonment. He was released in 1924 and was welcomed back warmly at home. His imprisonment benefited his cause because of unity of the Pashtoons. Soon, he embarked on an extensive tour of the

entire province. People gave him a sympathetic hearing and enrolled in a large number as members of his Anjuman.

In 1926, Ghaffar Khan, his wife, elder sister, and brother-in-law went on Haj. That year, the newly-established Saudi monarch, Sultan Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud, had invited distinguished Muslims from all over the world to Makkah to discuss important issues covering Islam and non-Muslim attitude towards Islam. The Indian representatives included, among others, Maulana Mohammad Ali, Maulana Shaukat Ali, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan and Maulana Ismail Ghaznavi. The discussion, however, centred around insignificant issues, which eventually resulted in discord.<sup>16</sup> Abdul Ghaffar Khan was not a delegate but saw things from the margins of the conference.

On his return journey he resumed his contact with the like-minded people in the N-WFP. As there was hardly any socio-political journal in the province, he decided to publish a journal in Pashto. In May 1928, the first issue of the *Pukhtun*, a monthly magazine, came out. It contained articles on a variety of subjects including politics, Pashtoon patriotism, Islamic history, gender issues, Indian affairs and social problems. Amanullah Khan's European visit was also given importance. It soon became a popular Pashto journal. Initially, its circulation was 500 copies but in due course it reached 3,000 and more.<sup>17</sup>

### **Formation of the Khudai Khidmatgar Organisation**

During late 1928, events in Afghanistan changed the outlook of the Pashtoon intelligentsia. On his return from his European tour, Amanullah Khan launched the second phase of his modernisation programme. He introduced certain reforms such as discarding of the traditional veil of the Afghan women. The conservative Afghan society did not like these drastic changes which Amanullah intended to introduce. They opposed the modernisation of Afghanistan and started an organised movement to oust Amanullah

from power. Compelled by the circumstances, Amanullah Khan abdicated and Habibullah popularly known as Bacha Saqao, a Tajik bandit usurped the throne. The Pashtoons were indignant over the overthrow of Amanullah which they saw as a British conspiracy. The Anjuman organised anti-government demonstrations and also decided to send a medical mission under Dr. Khan Sahib to help their Pashtoon brethren in Afghanistan. In March 1929, Ghaffar Khan and Mian Jaffar Shah were deputed by the Anjuman to meet Amanullah, then residing in Qandahar, and seek his permission for the medical mission. But they were not allowed to cross into Afghanistan and had to come back 'empty-handed'. Before anything could be done further, Amanullah forced by circumstances, went to Italy and settled there permanently.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile, Mian Akbar Shah (1899-1990), an active member of the Anjuman, who had gone Soviet Union via Afghanistan like other young 'revolutionaries',<sup>19</sup> proposed the formation of a youth league on the pattern of the Young Turks, the Young Afghans, the Young Bukharans, the Young Khivans and other similar organisations outside India. Ghaffar Khan appreciated the idea and agreed to serve as host to a meeting for the purpose. The meeting was convened on 1 September 1929, at Utmanzai which resulted in the formation of *Zalmo Jirga*.<sup>20</sup> Abdul Akbar Khan became its President and Mian Ahmad Shah its Secretary. Its membership was open to 'every youth without any discrimination of caste, creed or religion, provided he is literate', and that 'he should not participate in any form of communalism'. Pashto was made the official language for the Jirga's proceedings. Its other objectives included the 'attainment of complete independence for Hindustan by all possible means'. At the end of the meeting, about 70 participants enrolled themselves as members of the Youth League. An important feature of the Jirga was that the majority of the participants belonged to various academic

and professional fields. They belonged to the rural areas, though some of them had settled in urban centres for legal practice (majority being lawyers) but still were in touch with their relatives and friends in the villages. None of them was either a title-holder or a big landlord.<sup>21</sup>

To accommodate the majority of the aged and illiterate sympathisers of the Pashtoon cause, in November 1929 another organisation called the Khudai Khidmatgars (Servants of God) was formed. This new organisation quickly became very popular. Both the organisations worked for the promotion of Pashtoon nationalism and eradication of social evils from the society. They appealed, time and again, for the unity of the Pashtoons and showed their determination to get rid of the British.<sup>22</sup> The leaders were almost the same people. The same group of Pashtoon intelligentsia who were prominent in the *Zalmo Jirga* were in the forefront of the Khudai Khidmatgar organisation. Within a short span of time, they established a network of the organisation in the province, particularly the rural areas, hitherto neglected by other political organisations.

No accurate figures are available as to the exact number of the Khudai Khidmatgars and the networks of the branches. However, a careful study reveals that the membership had reached twelve to fifteen hundred. Many factors contributed to the popularity of the Khudai Khidmatgars. Different sections of the Pashtoon society interpreted its programme in their own way. 'To the Pashtoon intelligentsia, it was a movement for the revival of Pashtoon culture with its distinct identity. To the smaller Khans, [however,] it was a movement that demanded political reforms for the province that would enfranchise them and give them a greater role in the governance. Its anti-colonial stand suited the majority of the anti-establishment Ulema, who always regarded British rule in the sub-continent as a 'curse'. For the peasants and other poor classes it was against their economic oppressors,

British imperialism and its agents — the pro-British Nawabs, Khan Bahadurs and the big Khans'.<sup>23</sup>

From the beginning, the Khudai Khidmatgar leaders had put great emphasis on discipline. The volunteers were organised and drilled in military fashion. They were also given military ranks, i.e. generals, colonels, captains, etc. Before joining the organisation, the members had to pledge that they would abstain from the use of violence, intoxicants, intrigues, family-feuds and other vices then prevailing in the society.<sup>24</sup> The volunteers dressed themselves in uniforms, which varied in form and colour. As majority of the volunteers were poor, and thus could not afford any special uniform. They were advised to dip their ordinary clothes in brown or chocolate colour, which was cheap and easily available. This made them 'Red Shirts' in government documents, and later they came to be popularly known as the Red Shirts. The British Indian government made extensive propaganda against the Khudai Khidmatgars, and tried to equate them with the Bolsheviks, and even dubbed them as Russian agents, who intended to create anarchy and chaos in the country to destabilise the government — a charge always refuted by the Khudai Khidmatgars.

The most significant feature of the Khudai Khidmatgars was their adoption of non-violence and strict adherence to it. The volunteers were taught not to resort to violence and also not to carry weapons. The emphasis was on forbearance and tolerance. They were told not to retaliate, even if humiliated. Inspiration was provided by giving examples from the lives of Holy Prophet and his Companions. They were reminded of the atrocities perpetrated by the Makkans on Muslims during the initial days of Islam and how Holy Prophet and his Companions faced them with forbearance. After the conquest of Makkah, the Muslims could have avenged themselves but following the true path of non-violence, the Holy Prophet advised them not to do so.

Like many other tribal societies, Pashtoon society was also notorious for factionalism and violence. Ghaffar Khan's main emphasis was on the prevention of blood-feuds, particularly amongst the first cousins (*tarburs*). The Pashtoons really were exhausted by blood-feuds, undergoing heavy losses both physically and materially. They also wanted a remedy for these feuds. Moreover, they were told that by adopting non-violence the Pashtoon would never be defeated, as violence always breeds more violence. This sense of pride in registering victories over the colonial government gave the Khudai Khidmatgars more popularity and people started registering themselves in the Khudai Khidmatgar organisation in large numbers.

Ghaffar Khan had developed his particular perception of non-violence since early 1910s. That was the main reasons that he disapproved the armed struggle of the Haji Sahib of Turangzai against the Raj. Ghaffar Khan was convinced that the armed resistance would bring disaster and ruin upon the Pashtoons, who were already facing a lot of miseries as the inhabitants of a politically and strategically sensitive area. The biographers of Ghaffar Khan wrongly attributed it to the non-violence of Gandhi, and argue that it was a variant of the same non-violence preached by Gandhi in the rest of India. But their emphasis is surely misplaced. Actually, Gandhian non-violence had, literally speaking, very little effect on the Pashtoon mind. The number of Congress members in the N-WFP, before its merger with the Khudai Khidmatgars, was less than that required for a separate Congress Committee. Subsequent events during the War years and after proved that the Khudai Khidmatgars were the followers of Ghaffar Khan and not Gandhi. Ghaffar Khan's simple methods of preaching convinced the Pashtoons that the only panacea for their blood-feuds and factionalism was adoption of non-violence and strict adherence to it.

No other movement had ever received such a tremendous response as the Khudai Khidmatgars. Ghaffar Khan also emphasised communal harmony in the province. Therefore, the membership was kept open to all, irrespective of any discrimination of caste, community or religion. Hence, a large number of non-Muslims joined the Khudai Khidmatgar organisation.

### **The Political Path of the Khudai Khidmatgars**

In December 1929, Ghaffar Khan and other prominent Khudai Khidmatgars attended the Lahore session of Indian National Congress. The Congress delegates met at the banks of river Ravi under the presidentship of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and declared the complete independence for India as its goal. One of the main purposes of Abdul Ghaffar Khan and the Khudai Khidmatgars visiting Lahore and attending the Congress session was to draw the attention Indian public opinion to the 'cramped Frontier atmosphere'. They met the Congress leaders, apprised them of the current situation in the frontier and sought their help in this connection. The Congress high command promised to send a committee to enquire into their grievances. Ghaffar Khan was highly impressed by the enthusiasm and discipline of the Congress workers. On their return to the N-WFP, Ghaffar Khan and the rest of the Khudai Khidmatgars toured the entire province and organised people on the pattern of Congress organisation. Jirgas had been formed at village levels. Ghaffar Khan endorsed the Congress programme of complete independence and non-payment of taxes and revenues. In March 1930, Gandhi launched his civil disobedience movement against the government. The Congress after endorsing Gandhi's decision directed the provincial Congress Committees to undertake civil disobedience movement accordingly.

In the N-WFP, although the Congress organisation had existed since 1922, it had been amalgamated with the Punjab

Congress Committee owing to the lack of membership. On 15 April 1930, the Provincial Congress workers brought special clay from Pabbi and defied the government by manufacturing salt. However, no arrests were made.<sup>25</sup> The next step was the picketing of liquor shops and April 23 was selected for this purpose. The local workers requested Ghaffar Khan to give them the required support to which he agreed. The annual meeting of the Azad School, Utmanzai, was held on 19-20 April 1930, attended by a large number of Khudai Khidmatgars and members of *Zalmo Jirga*. After the meeting, the participants numbering more than twelve hundred, were invited to join the Congress civil disobedience movement.<sup>26</sup>

On the night of 23 April, prominent leaders of the FPCC were arrested. To avoid 'unrest' in the rest of the province, particularly the rural areas of the province, it was decided to arrest the noted Khudai Khidmatgars.<sup>27</sup> Allah Bakhsh Barqi and Ghulam Rabbani Sethi, two prominent local Congress leaders, avoided arrest during the previous night but surrendered on the 23 morning. Many volunteers accompanied them to the prison. This worsened the already tense situation and sparked off a peaceful agitation which led to the indiscriminate firing of the troops on unarmed Congress/Khilafat volunteers and the Khudai Khidmatgars at Qissa Khwani Bazaar, resulting in the deaths of more than two hundred people. This was only the second massacre of this kind after the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy in the Punjab in April 1919.<sup>28</sup> Ghaffar Khan and other Khudai Khidmatgar leaders were arrested and sentenced to three years rigorous imprisonment and were sent to Gujarat jail in the Punjab.<sup>29</sup>

The Qissa Khwani Bazaar massacre was followed by a second firing incident at Peshawar on 31 May, killing twelve persons. On 16 May, Utmanzai was devastated by troops. On 25 May, the army ransacked Takkar, a village in Mardan and worst kind of atrocities over the Khudai Khidmatgars were committed. On 24 August, a peaceful mob at Hathi

Khel (Bannu) was fired upon, killing seventy persons at the spot. A ban was immediately put on the Khudai Khidmatgars, *Zalmo Jirga*, FPCC and *Naujawan Bharat Sabha* (Frontier Branch). On 16 August, Martial Law was declared and for the time being the Province was cut off from the rest of the subcontinent. Visits to and from the province were not allowed and all sorts of communication were strictly censored.<sup>30</sup> Frequent firing and lathi charge foray into the unarmed, non-violent Khudai Khidmatgar became a routine. The Khudai Khidmatgars were stripped and flogged and forced to walk naked through the cordons of soldiers who prodded them with rifles and bayonets as they passed. They were physically humiliated publicly and all kind of inhumane treatment was inflicted upon them. On previous occasions, when the Khudai Khidmatgars had not yet pledged themselves to non-violence, all such acts of provocation were avenged by the Pashtoons, whenever, they got an opportunity. However, now they were told to bear all these atrocities and insults with forbearance and courage, and not to retaliate. The Khudai Khidmatgars faithfully followed Ghaffar Khan and offered no resistance to the government. Ironically, appalled at the attitude of the government oppression and as a reaction to the government atrocities over the non-violent Khudai Khidmatgars, a large number of Frontier inhabitants enrolled themselves in the Khudai Khidmatgar cadres, thus providing a boost to the movement. Before 23 April 1930, the Khudai Khidmatgars were about twelve hundred, but, after the government repression, their number exceeded twenty-five thousands within a couple of months.

Mian Jaffar Shah and Abdullah Shah, two of the prominent Khudai Khidmatgars, who had escaped sentence, secretly went to Gujarat jail and met Ghaffar Khan and other Khudai Khidmatgar leaders and informed them of the government's oppression in the N-WFP. They further told them that the government was trying to prove their

connection with the Bolsheviks. To avoid further repression by the government, it was decided to affiliate their organisation with an all-India political body. As Mian Jaffar Shah had contacts in the Punjab, especially with Malik Lal Khan, the Khilafatist, he used that channel to meet Sir Fazli Hussain, the 'strong man of Unionism' in the Punjab, and a prominent member of the Viceroy's Executive Council. But to the utter despair of the Khudai Khidmatgars he refused to help them against the British government. Their next choice was the Indian National Congress. As the Congress was on the war path against the British Indian government, they readily agreed to make a common cause with the Khudai Khidmatgars against British imperialism.<sup>31</sup> But meanwhile the political scenario had been changed.

On 5 March 1931, a settlement was reached between the government and Congress as a result of the Gandhi-Irwin pact. The arrested Congress leaders and workers were released and the government agreed to withdraw the Ordinances promulgated during the civil disobedience movement. For its part, the Congress agreed to stop the civil disobedience movement and end the boycott of the British goods. On 11 March, Ghaffar Khan and the rest of the Khudai Khidmatgars were released under the said Pact. Soon after his release, Ghaffar Khan went back to the N-WFP and resumed his work of organising the Khudai Khidmatgars. He described the Pact as a temporary truce and exhorted the Khudai Khidmatgars to prepare for another conflict. Meanwhile, the Khudai Khidmatgars were invited to the Congress session to be held in the last week of March 1931 at Karachi. Ghaffar Khan and about seventy prominent Khudai Khidmatgars attended. On 30 March, Ghaffar Khan publicly confirmed his association with the Congress. On 9 August, the *Zalmo Jirga* and the Khudai Khidmatgars were formally federated with the Congress, but retained their separate identity.<sup>32</sup> Ghaffar Khan was appointed as the leader of these organisations in the N-WFP,

and thus he put an end to the faction fighting among the Congress workers.

Ghaffar Khan was accused by some of his close associates, including Mian Ahmad Shah, Abdul Akbar Khan Akbar and Mohammad Akbar Khadim, for merging the Khudai Khidmatgars with the Hindu-dominated Congress. They were particularly indignant over what they saw as the Khudai Khidmatgars losing their separate identity on merger with the Congress. Ghaffar Khan, however, argued that he had sought the merger as a last resort because the Pashtoons needed help from outside the province. He saw no harm in the merger with the Congress. He gave examples from the life of the Holy Prophet who made alliances even with Jews and Christians to protect and safeguard the interests of the Muslims.<sup>33</sup> It is a fact that after their merger with the Congress, the Khudai Khidmatgars got popularity on an all-India level. They were now part of the main stream of national politics. In turn, the Congress obtained the support of an overwhelmingly Muslim-majority province, which became useful in refuting the Muslim League that the Congress was a Hindu political organisation.

But soon differences emerged between Abdul Ghaffar Khan and the Congress over the latter's decision, known as the Poona Offer (September 1939) of conditional support to the British war effort. Ghaffar Khan was unhappy over the Congress decision. 'We have been condemning war and their horrors', Ghaffar Khan remarked, 'and now is the time to prove our sincerity and resist all attempts to be dragged into any wicked combination for that purpose'.<sup>34</sup> He decided to resign from the CWC and on 8 July informed the Congress high command of his decision to resign. By his resignation, Ghaffar Khan proved himself to be a firm believer in non-violence. Moreover, this also demonstrated that being a man of strict principles, he was in no way ready to follow Gandhi blindly. On occasions he would insist that his organisation was a separate organisation and had chosen

to collaborate with Congress for achieving independence from the British yoke. A rift, however, was averted when the AICC resolved at Ramgarh, that the Congress would not endorse British war aims. Ghaffar Khan rejoined the Congress and he was instantly authorised to direct the Congress *Satyagraha* movement in the N-WFP. He began by undertaking a whirlwind tour of the province, enrolling volunteers and organising training camps at various places. His main purpose was to discourage the Frontier people from supporting the British war effort and enlisting themselves as recruits in British army until the Indian problem was solved.<sup>35</sup>

After the 'Quit India' resolution, passed on 8 August 1942 at Bombay, the Congress launched its civil disobedience movement against the government. In the N-WFP, the situation remained calm in the beginning. Despite some 'disorders' created by the local Congress workers, the authorities desisted from the use of force. However, with the passage of time, the government abandoned its earlier policy. In late October 1942, Congress volunteers were brutally lathi-charged and the demonstrations fired upon. Ghaffar Khan was also not spared and was beaten mercilessly, which broke two of his ribs. On 27 October, he was arrested at Mir Wais Dheri, a suburb of Mardan.<sup>36</sup>

During the early months of 1945, the war situation improved. As a gesture of good will the detained Congress leaders were released. In March 1945, the recently released Dr. Khan Sahib moved a vote of no confidence against the Muslim League ministry of Sardar Aurangzeb Khan. The motion was carried and Aurangzeb Khan and his colleagues were forced to tender their resignations.<sup>37</sup> On 16 March, Dr. Khan Sahib was invited by the Frontier Governor to form a ministry. One of its first acts was to order the release of Ghaffar Khan and the rest of the Khudai Khidmatgars, detained since their participation in the 'Quit India' movement.

The events now began to move rapidly. After the failure of the Simla Conference a Cabinet Delegation was sent to India to solve the Indian problem. The Mission arrived in Delhi on 24 March 1946 and immediately started negotiations with important political organisations. The discussions with the political parties ended in failure, as the majority of them were bitterly opposed to each other. Eventually, on 16 May, the Mission forwarded its own proposals which they thought provided the best solution of the Indian problem. Under the proposed arrangements, the central Government would deal with foreign affairs, defence and currency. All the remaining powers were given to the provinces, which were merged into these three groups: Section A: Bihar, Bombay, CP, Madras, Orissa and UP (Hindu-majority areas); Section B: N-WFP, the Punjab and Sindh (Muslim majority areas); and, Section C: Assam and Bengal (small Muslim majority areas).

In the N-WFP, the provincial Congress leaders were not happy over the compulsory grouping clause because they thought it gave the Punjab a permanent domination. Until then they had been supporting the Congress demand for a United India. In the changed circumstances, however, they demanded maximum provincial autonomy within the Indian context, so that they could control their own affairs without interference from any quarter. Ghaffar Khan opposed the compulsory grouping clause, as it would force them to join the Punjab. At the same time, he was not willing to join the Hindu-majority provinces hundreds of miles away from the Frontier Province. The Frontier Congress Muslims, declared Ghaffar Khan, were ready to join Group B, provided the Punjab gave them assurances for better treatment. Alternatively, they would be happy to carve out their own destiny.<sup>38</sup> One of the main concerns of Ghaffar Khan was to find a respectable place for the Pashtoons in the future political set up of the subcontinent.

In August 1946, communal riots broke out in various parts of Calcutta and soon it spread to Noakhali, Bihar and some parts of the UP. The authorities were unable to control the communal frenzy. Thousands of people were murdered. The massacres of autumn 1946, destroyed all hopes of Hindu-Muslim unity in the subcontinent, and eventually led to the partition of India. In the N-WFP, the riots changed the outlook of the majority of the pro-League Muslims. Earlier, they always gave priority to their ethnic considerations, i.e. Pashtoon first and Muslims afterwards. But now they started thinking otherwise. Their sense of belonging to a larger Muslim community became stronger. The Frontier Muslim League exploited the communal riots and sent teams to investigate the details of massacre in the riots-affected areas. They came back with the accounts of rape, torture, murder, destruction of mosques and the desecration of the Holy Quran. The provincial League achieved successes within months, which otherwise it would not have thought of achieving in years.

Since any change within the legislature where 33 members in a House of 50 were Congressmen or their supporters was impossible, a different strategy had to be adopted. The Frontier Muslim League now started devising ways to topple the Frontier Congress ministry. The League organised a systematic campaign for Pakistan wherein a separate Muslim state was presented as the only solution of the Hindu-Muslim problem. It also started a civil disobedience movement against Dr. Khan Sahib's ministry. This way the Muslim League wanted to prove that an overwhelming majority of the Muslim population supported the League demand for Pakistan.

As detailed discussion of the provincial Muslim League civil disobedience movement is out of scope of the present study, I shall confine myself to Ghaffar Khan's activities. He remained busy in touring the riots-affected areas of Bengal and Bihar and tried to build confidence among the shattered

Muslims. He also proposed a non-political Committee to help the riot victims to restart their routine life. He was unhappy over the destruction caused by the worst communal strife. He was so affected by what he saw in Bihar that Abdul Ghaffar Khan could not refrain himself from declaring that 'India today seems an inferno and my heart weeps to see our homes set on fire by ourselves. I find today darkness reigning over India and my eyes vainly turn from one direction to another to see light'.<sup>39</sup>

### **The Frontier and Partition**

Events were changing drastically. On 20 February 1947, Clement Attlee, the British Prime Minister announced that power would be transferred to Indian hands by June 1948 at the latest.<sup>40</sup> On 22 March, Lord Mountbatten arrived in India replacing Lord Wavell as the Viceroy. One of his foremost concerns was the peaceful transfer of power to Indian hands. On 3 June 1947, he presented his plan for the partition of India. 15 August was chosen as the earliest possible date for the transfer of power from the British to Indian hands. Apart from many other things, the plan proposed a referendum to decide whether N-WFP wanted to join India or Pakistan. Jawaharlal Nehru, speaking on behalf of the Congress, confirmed acceptance of the partition plan. On 14 June, the AICC met at Delhi and approved the proposed partition plan. In the N-WFP, the partition plan aroused mixed feelings. While the Frontier Muslim League was happy about the announcement regarding the referendum on the question of N-WFP's joining India or Pakistan, the Khudai Khidmatgars were indignant. But because of the changed circumstances, they were left with no other option but to adjust themselves to the changing scenario of the current Indian politics.

Till recent past, the Khudai Khidmatgars were confident that Congress would not accept the partition of India. Time and again they were assured by the Congress high

command that they would resist any attempt in connection with the division of India. But on the acceptance of the 3 June Plan, the Khudai Khidmatgars were stunned. To their chagrin, the Congress had accepted the partition plan, including a referendum in the N-WFP, without even consulting the Frontier Congress leaders. There was only a token protest from J. Kripalani, the Congress president, who protested over the holding of referendum without the Frontier Congressmen being given the choice of the inclusion of a third option, i.e. an autonomous Pashtoonistan. He informed the Viceroy of the growing demand for Pashtoonistan in the province. The Viceroy immediately rejected the demand and informed the Congress president that it was at Nehru's request that the proposal to allow every province to vote for Pakistan, Hindustan or independence had been dropped. He expressed his inability to re-introduce the proposal at that critical time.<sup>41</sup> This was merely intended to show the Frontier leaders that the Congress had done its best to reverse the decision, otherwise they regarded the Viceroy's proposal as the best under the given circumstances, and were in no way going to risk the future of India on the Frontier issue.<sup>42</sup> On the Viceroy's refusal, the Congress withdrew its suggestions without the slightest protest and dropped the issue forever.

The CWC and the AICC dutifully ratified the decision regarding the division of India including a referendum in the N-WFP. Abdul Ghaffar Khan was unhappy and visibly disturbed over the Congress' acceptance of the proposed referendum. He regarded it as an act of treachery on the part of the Congress. 'We Pakhtuns stood by you and had undergone great sacrifices for attaining freedom', he remarked 'but you have now deserted us and thrown us to the wolves'.<sup>43</sup> But 'we shall not agree to hold referendum because we had decisively won the elections on the issue of Hindustan versus Pakistan and proclaimed the Pakhtun

view on it to the world. Now, as Congress has disowned us, why should we have a referendum on Hindustan and Pakistan? Let it be on Pakhtunistan or Pakistan'.<sup>44</sup>

On 18 June, a meeting was arranged between Ghaffar Khan and Jinnah. Ghaffar Khan informed Jinnah of the conditional support of the Khudai Khidmatgars to Pakistan to which Jinnah asked them first to join Pakistan and then to decide these matters with mutual understanding. Ghaffar Khan told Jinnah that he would discuss it further with his party and then would report to him.<sup>45</sup> On 21 June, a joint meeting of the Frontier Provincial Congress Committee, Khudai Khidmatgars and other affiliated organisations was held at Bannu. After giving the details of the acceptance of partition plan, Ghaffar Khan asked them for their views. They were indignant over the Congress treachery, which caused deep resentment. They unanimously opposed the holding of referendum and demanded the establishment of an autonomous Pashtoon state which would have its own constitution based on the traditional Pashtoon cultural values and the Islamic concept of democracy, equality and social justice.<sup>46</sup> However, despite the boycott of the Khudai Khidmatgars the referendum was held between 6 and 17 July 1947, and the results were announced on 20 July. The Provincial Congress in a protest did not take part in the polling. According to the official results, the votes polled in favour of Pakistan were 50.49 per cent of the total electorate.<sup>47</sup> Ghaffar Khan accused the referendum staff of taking sides with the League. 'As we took no part in the referendum', remarked Ghaffar Khan, 'the Muslim League had no hurdles to cross'.<sup>48</sup>

Pakistan came into being on 14 August 1947. The Khudai Khidmatgars were thus forced to join a state which they had opposed until recently. They had regarded Pakistan as an electioneering ploy of the AIML which had now become a reality. Under the changed circumstances, the Khudai Khidmatgars and their affiliated bodies met, at

Sardaryab (Peshawar) on 3-4 September 1947 and pledged loyalty to the new state. The provincial authorities, with Abdul Qaiyum, as the new Frontier Chief Minister, who was known for his anti-Khudai Khidmatgar attitude, started a campaign of intimidation and torture against them.

On 23 February 1948, Ghaffar Khan, in his capacity as a member of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, attended the first session held at Karachi and formally took the oath of allegiance to Pakistan. Jinnah was overwhelmed by Ghaffar Khan's positive attitude and invited him for meals. In return, Ghaffar Khan invited Jinnah to the N-WFP and requested him to spend some time with the Khudai Khidmatgars to which Jinnah agreed.<sup>49</sup> In April 1948, Jinnah visited the N-WFP. However, he refused to meet the Khudai Khidmatgars at Sardaryab and asked Ghaffar Khan to come to Peshawar instead. Ghaffar Khan went to Peshawar, met Jinnah, who invited him to join the Muslim League. Ghaffar Khan showed his inability to do so. Their meeting ended in a failure. Ghaffar Khan accused the provincial administration, particularly the Chief Minister Abdul Qaiyum, of creating misunderstandings between Jinnah and the Khudai Khidmatgars.<sup>50</sup>

After the failure of a rapprochement, the Frontier authorities led by Abdul Qaiyum started a campaign of intimidation against the Khudai Khidmatgars and the Frontier nationalists. They were dubbed as 'friends of India and Congress and traitors to Pakistan', thus justifying their acts of repression against the Khudai Khidmatgars. A wilful campaign was initiated by the authorities to denigrate the Khudai Khidmatgars and their struggle. Even the school/college textbooks were changed in accordance to the new policy and nothing has been done to set the record straight.

## Notes and References

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- 1 It included D. G. Tendulkar, *Abdul Ghaffar Khan* (Bombay, 1967); Mahadev Desai, *Two Servants of God* (Delhi, 1935); Eknath Easwaran, *A Man to Match His Mountains* (California, 1985); Girdhari Lalpuri, *Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan* (Delhi, 1985); M. S. Korejo, *The Frontier Gandhi: His Place in History* (Karachi, 1994); G. L. Zutshi, *Frontier Gandhi* (Delhi, 1970); J. S. Bright, *Frontier and Its Gandhi* (Lahore, 1944); Allah Bakhsh Yusufi, *Meet the Frontier Gandhi* (Bombay, nd); R. S. Nagina, *Gandhiji Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan Ki Nazar Mein* (Urdu) (Delhi, nd); Hari Bhao Joshi, *Badshah Khan* (Urdu) (Hyderabad, 1968); and, Farigh Bokhari, *Bacha Khan* (Urdu) (Peshawar, 1957).
- 2 Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism: Muslim Politics in the North-West Frontier Province 1937-1947* (Karachi, Oxford University Press, 1999-2000), p. 4.
- 3 For details see Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah, 'Redefining Constitutional Politics: the N-WFP and the Raj, 1901-1932', *The Calcutta Historical Journal* vol. XXI and XXII, 1999-2000, pp. 115-137.
- 4 According to Abdul Ghaffar 'One day I had gone to Peshawar to see a friend of mine who was a cavalry officer in this regiment, and we were standing and talking in the street when an English lieutenant passed by. My friend was bare-headed. He sported a fashionable haircut and a thick mop of hair adorned his forehead. When the English lieutenant saw this he became furious and cried: 'Really! You damn Sardar Sahib! So you want to be an Englishman, do you?'. My friend turned deadly pale but he did not have the courage to reply. This incident left a very

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deep impression on me. Had not Barani Kaka always told me of the respect one was treated in the Army? But here I had witnessed the worst possible insult. On that day I gave up the idea of joining the Army or seeking my employment with the British'. Abdul Ghaffar, *My Life and Struggle* (Delhi, Hind Pocket Books, 1969), pp. 20-21.

- 5 Abdul Wali Khan, *Bacha Khan au Khudai Khidmatgari I*, (Pashto) (Peshawar, 1993), p. 47.
- 6 Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, p. 18.
- 7 D. G. Tendulkar, *Abdul Ghaffar Khan* (Bombay, 1967), p. 22.
- 8 Ghaffar Khan, *Zama Zhwand au Jaddo Jihad* (Pashto) (Kabul, 1983), pp. 94-107.
- 9 Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, p. 19.
- 10 Abdul Ghaffar Khan, *Zama Zhwand*, pp. 138-160.
- 11 Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah, 'N-WFP and the Khilafat & Hijrat Movements', *Central Asia*, No. 20, Summer 1987, pp. 128-136.
- 12 Abdul Ghaffar Khan, *Zama Zhwand*, pp. 177-180.
- 13 Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, p. 22; Abdul Akbar Khan, 'Autobiography' (Pashto) (unpublished), pp. 8-10.
- 14 Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, p. 23; Akbar Khan Akbar, 'Autobiography', pp. 18-21.
- 15 Farigh Bokhari, *Bacha Khan* (Urdu) (Peshawar, 1957), pp. 58-59.
- 16 Abdul Ghaffar Khan, *Zama Zhwand*, pp. 320-323.
- 17 Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, p. 25.

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- 18     ibid, p. 25.
- 19     Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah, 'Some Indian Travellers in Central Asia', *Central Asia*, No. 25, 1989, pp. 73-101; Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah, 'Mian Akbar Shah — A Profile', *Central Asia*, No. 27, 1990, pp. 113-126.
- 20     Abdul Ghaffar Khan, *Zama Zhwand*, pp. 350-351.
- 21     Abdul Karim Khan, 'The Khudai Khidmatgar (Servants of God)/Red Shirt Movement in the North-West Frontier Province of British India, 1927-1947', (unpublished Ph. D Dissertation, University of Hawaii, 1997), p. 60.
- 22     'An Appeal to the Khudai Khidmatgars', Hijab Gul, *Pukhtun*, Utmanzai, November 1929, p. 38.
- 23     Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, pp. 27-28.
- 24     The volunteers had to take the following pledge before getting enrolled in the organisation (translated from Pashto):
- 'I call on God as a witness, and solemnly declare on oath that I will abide by the following principles:
- 1: With sincerity and faith, I offer my name for Khudai Khidmatgarship.
  - 2: I will sacrifice my wealth, comfort and self in the service of my nation and for the liberation of my country.
  - 3: I will never have 'parajamba' (party feeling), enmity with or wilfully oppose any body; and I shall help the oppressed against the oppressor.
  - 4: I will not become a member of any other rival party nor will I give security or apologise during the fight.
  - 5: I will always obey every lawful order of every officer of mine.

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- 6: I will always abide by the principle of non-violence.
- 7: I will serve all human beings alike, and my goal will be the attainment of the freedom of my country and my religion.
- 8: I will always perform good and noble deeds.
- 9: All my efforts will be directed to seeking the will of God and not towards mere show or becoming an office-holder'. Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, p. 44.
- 25 Akbar, 'Autobiography', p. 111.
- 26 For details see Ahmad, *Khudai Khidmatgar Tehreek* (Peshawar, 1991), pp. 182-193; Abdul Khaliq Khaleeq, *Da Azadi Jang* (Pashto) (Peshawar, 1972), pp. 63-65.
- 27 Secret Report on the Situation in Peshawar, F. C. Icemonger, IGP, N-WFP, May 1931, F. No. 54, Special Branch Peshawar, p. 16.
- 28 Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, p. 32. For more details see *Report [With Evidence] of the Peshawar Enquiry Committee* (Allahabad, 1930), pp. 6-28.
- 29 *Civil & Military Gazette*, 28 April 1930.
- 30 For details see Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, pp. 32-33; *The Frontier Tragedy* (Khilafat Committee Report) (Lahore, 1930), pp. 1-57; Ahmad, *Khudai Khidmatgar Tehreek*, pp. 182-426; Mian Jaffar Shah, Abdullah Shah, *A Statement of Facts About the Present Situation in the N-WFP* (Lahore, 1930), pp. 1-12; 'Report of Devadas Gandhi on the N-WFP' (1931), F. No. P-16 (1932), pp. 165-199, AICC Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Delhi; Warris Khan, *Da Azadi Tehreek* (Peshawar, 1988), pp. 82-84.
- 31 Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, p. 34.

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- 32     ibid, p. 34; and, Khaleeq, *Da Azadi Jang*, pp. 100-107.
- 33     Abdul Ghaffar Khan, 'Za au Congress', *Pukhtun*, June-July 1931, pp. 5-10; and *Pukhtun*, 1 August 1938, pp. 22-23.
- 34     *Pukhtun*, 11 March 1940, pp. 4-9.
- 35     Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, p. 129.
- 36     Abdul Ghaffar Khan, *Zama Zhwand*, pp. 670-672.
- 37     For details on the formation and working of Muslim League ministry see Shah, *Muslim League in N-WFP* (Karachi, 1992), pp. 64-71.
- 38     Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, pp. 172-173; Abdul Ghaffar Khan on Compulsory Grouping under the cabinet Mission Plan, *Pukhtun*, 17 July 1946, pp. 6-8 and *Pukhtun*, 9 September 1946, p. 17.
- 39     Tendulkar, *Abdul Ghaffar Khan*, p. 403.
- 40     *Indian Annual Register*, 1947, I, pp. 37-38.
- 41     Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, p. 219; Mountbatten to Earl of Listowel, 3 June 1947, *Transfer of Power*, XI (London, 1982), pp. 104-105.
- 42     Minutes of Viceroy's Tenth Misc: Meeting, 8 May 1947, *Transfer of Power*, X, pp. 670-675.
- 43     Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, p. 221; Pyarelal, *Thrown to the Wolves* (Calcutta, 1966), pp. 96-97.
- 44     ibid, p. 221.
- 45     Ghaffar Khan informed Jinnah of the readiness of the Khudai Khidmatgars to join Pakistan provided he accepted: (a) complete provincial autonomy; (b) the right for the province to secede from Pakistan if it so desired; and (c) the right to admission to the N-WFP

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of contiguous territories inhabited by the Pashtoons. *Pukhtun*, 1 July 1947, pp. 13-15; *The Pakistan Times*, 19 June 1947.

46 Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, p. 222; Abdul Ghaffar Khan, *Zama Zhwand*, pp. 735-736.

47 *ibid*, p.226.

48 Tendulkar, *Abdul Ghaffar Khan*, p. 448.

49 Tendulkar, *Abdul Ghaffar Khan*, p. 453.

50 Farigh Bokhari, *Bacha Khan*, pp. 271-272; Tendulkar, *Abdul Ghaffar Khan*, p. 461.