

BACHA KHAN AND NONVIOLENCE: HOPE FOR PEACE IN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

By Jahan Zeb

It was a historical day that Bacha Khan (1890 - 1988) was born in the strategic tall mountains of Pashtun land located on the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Bacha Khan is also known as, Abdul Ghafar Khan, Fakhr-e-Afghan, non-violent Muslim soldier of Islam and a man to match his mountains. When Bacha Khan was died, flags were lowered in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India because the people of these countries have respect for his services to earn freedom.

Khan is standing tall in the line of the finest leaders of the world such as Mahatma Gandhi, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela in many aspects. Bacha Khan's exclusivity was eminent due to the fact

that he was born and raised in the mountainous region of Pashtun land that was agrarian and encountered with family and tribal feuds. Bacha Khan was sanded to see such difficulties and hardships.

The 6'5"charismatic Khan stood up to overcome it through community mobilization, education, and social and economic reforms. He raised over 100,000 strong nonviolent army of men, women, and youth — the Khudai Khidmatgars, or servants of God — drawn from the multi-ethnic traditions of the subcontinent (currently India, Pakistan and Bangladesh) and Afghanistan. These servants of God included the diverse cultures, ethnicities, nationalities and religions



such as Muslims, as well as Hindus, Christians, Parsees, Sikhs, and Buddhists. They came together in the cause of peace, social justice, religious tolerance, freedom and human dignity for all.

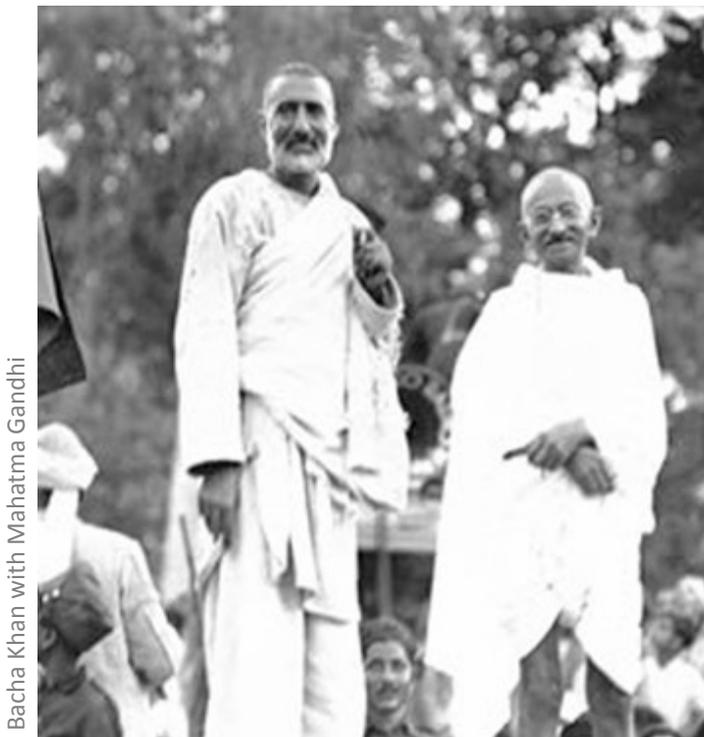
Bacha Khan was beaten, jailed, and exiled by the British rulers of United India because they thought that his reforms may be converted into a freedom movement if he is allowed to reform his people. When his reforms were blocked, his servants of God movement joined hands with Indian National Congress to raise a voice for their victimization. And there they started struggle for the freedom of India from the British rulers.

Khan mentored his nonviolent army to internalize the nonviolence struggle and prepared them to peacefully protest against the British rule to get India free. The British Army beat the Khudai Khidmatgars and dragged them in the streets, removed their clothes and humiliated them in front of their mothers

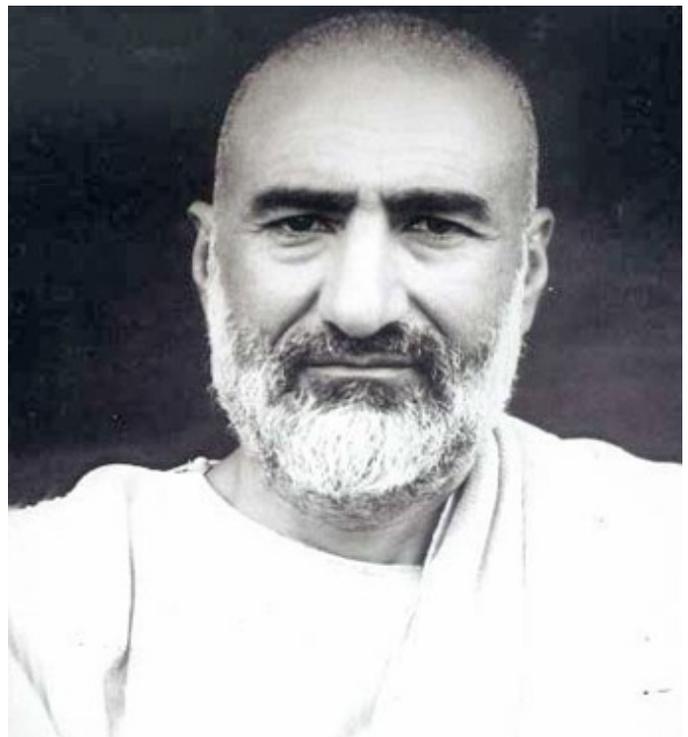
and sisters but they did not respond with violence. Bacha Khan writes in his autobiography *Zama Zhwand au Jaddo Jihad* (My Life and Struggle) that “violence promotes dislike and hatred. Anyone can do violence but only strong people can practice nonviolence because nonviolence needs courage.¹ This was the message that he gave to his people which still continues in form of the 2.3 million members of the Awami National Party Pakistan.

According to Senator Afrasiab Khattak, peace envoy, Government of Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan, the nonviolence philosophy of Bacha Khan is based on the teachings of Buddhism and Islamic sageness - the basic principles of Pashtuns and regional society which is fully aligned with universal humanism and bonding.²

The west resisted the philosophy of nonviolence and struggle for freedom of Bacha Khan due to the cold war rivalry



Bacha Khan with Mahatma Gandhi



Bacha Khan



among the USSR, India the West. Thankfully this mind-set is slowly changing because violence can no more confined to specific countries and regions. It is in this context that the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton quoted Bacha Khan in an Iftar (evening meal for breaking the daily fast during the Islamic month of Ramadan) dinner hosted by her “that we need to be inspired by our leaders to fight poverty, injustice and hate with, “the weapon of the Prophet-patience and righteousness.” Well, that, to me, sums up much of what we celebrate tonight as we breakfast.”³

Over two million courageous followers of Bacha Khan are fighting the worst form of militant violence, social and political instability in Pakistan with the nonviolence weapon that Bacha Khan gave to them. Pashtuns are not only fighting this fight against militancy for their own survival but the broader regional and regional peace and stability.

What can be done?

- The civil society, academia and the international community need to study and analyse the struggle of Bacha Khan and create positive discourse through seminars and conferences to defeat extremism and bring peace in AfPak and the region.
- The people and governments of Afghanistan, Pakistan and India need to include the life of Bacha Khan in their national curricula to highlight positive role model to give hope for peace to the children and youth.
- The governments of Afghanistan, Pakistan and India need to find common bonds through the

services of Bacha Khan and work towards free trade and shared market to bring economic prosperity for their future generations.

- Hollywood and Bollywood needs to make films on the life and struggle of Khan legacy to advance a greater, broader, and inspired understanding of what is currently perceived as Muslim, Pashtun, and Afghan. His heroic life offers a profound message of hope for these increasingly troubled times.⁴

Notes:

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1. Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Zama Zhwand au Jaddo Jihad(My Life and Struggle) (Kabul, 1983)
2. Afrasiyab Khattak ! Bacha Khan and Nonviolence, Kabul Seminar, Retrieved February 27, 2012 from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3bXL3G2R1U>
3. Remarks by Hillary Rodham Clinton at the Annual State Department Iftaar Dinner. (2009). Retrieved January 27, 2012, from US Department of State website: <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/09/129232.htm>
4. The Frontier Gandhi Badshah Khan | A Film by T.C. McLuhan. Retrieved February 29, 2012 from <http://www.thefrontiergandhi.com/about.html>

