



## Nation, Nonviolence, and Service in Pakistan

*Bacha Khan [1890–1988]*

I cannot cease thinking of Badshah Khan. He is a prodigy. I am seeing more and more of his deeply spiritual nature daily. He has patience, faith and nonviolence joined in true humility. Countless Pathans have enshrined him in their hearts as their uncrowned king. For such a person there can be no defeat.

[Mahatma Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi to his grand-niece Manu, in Gandhi, 2008: 191]

I am a *Khudai Khidmatgar* [Servant of God], and as God needs no service, but serving His creation is serving Him, I promise to serve humanity in the name of God. I promise to refrain from violence and from taking revenge. I promise to forgive those who oppress me or treat me with cruelty. I promise to refrain from taking part in feuds and quarrels and from creating enmity. I promise to treat every Pathan as my brother and friend. I promise to refrain from anti-social customs and practices. I promise to live a simple life, to practise virtue and to refrain from evil. I promise to practice good manners and good behaviour, and not to lead a life of idleness. I promise to devote at least two hours a day to social work.

[Bacha Khan's *Khudai Khidmatgar Oath*, in Khan, 1969: 97]

Do you mean to say that [Bacha Khan], a Pathan, believes in non-violence? Impossible. No Pathan does. If they say they do, they are lying.

[Lord Irwin to Mahatma Gandhi, Khan, 1969: 127]

Of all the modern Muslim advocates and practitioners of pacifism and nonviolence discussed in this study, none is less dispensable than ‘Abd al-Ghaffār Khān. Famed in his own right, he is still more widely known by the honorifics Bacha Khan (also spelled Badshah Khan or Bachcha Khan) and *Fakhr-e Afghān*: King of Chieftains, Pride of the Afghans. He remains one of the most salient leaders of the largest successful nonviolent political movement in human history: the concerted effort on the part of the population of the Indian subcontinent to rid themselves of British colonial rule. Bacha Khan garnered enormous admiration both throughout his life and after it, in spite of his insistence that ‘I have told you before and I am telling you again: I do not wish to be your leader, now or ever. I do not wish to be your master or your guide’ [Khan, 1969: 255]. Whatever the truth of Khan’s protestations, and no matter their effect, a year before his death he became the only non-citizen of India (with the sole subsequent exception of Nelson Mandela) to receive that country’s highest civilian honour. In 1987, Khan received the *Bharat Ratna* [‘Jewel of India’] reserved for luminaries in scholarship and the arts such as Amartya Sen, Ravi Shankar, and M. S. Subbalakshmi, as well as political giants such as B. R. Ambedkar, Rajendra Prasad, and Jawaharlal Nehru. Not all his accolades were so enviable, however. He was, after all, in his day named Prisoner of Conscience of the Year by Amnesty International, ‘[h]is offence is that he has too strong a following among his own people’ [Amnesty, 1963: 1]. By the time of his death in 1988, Bacha Khan had spent over one-third of his centenarian life behind bars [Bala, 2013: 136]. He was incarcerated first by Britain and then by independent Pakistan and often kept for long periods in solitary confinement.

Unlike Amadou Bamba, discussed in Chapter 1, Khan was neither well versed in the traditional Islamic sciences nor committed to Sufism. But, like Bamba, he both employed nonviolence as a weapon against imperialism and redeployed traditionally Islamic as well as secular rhetorics of warfare so as to express the urgent need for personal moral self-improvement. The role of (Wolof) cultural revival in nonviolent moral improvement in Chapter 1 is if anything even more pronounced in the (Pashtun) case of Khan – both in contradistinction to the more explicitly cosmopolitan figures encountered in later chapters. Again, like Bamba, the degree to which Khan has come to be remembered for his socio-political impact may belie the degree to which he regarded himself first and foremost as a public servant [*khidmatgar*] and educator. The nature of that service and that pedagogy has in this case been further

obfuscated, as will soon be seen, by Khan's collaboration with the parallel but importantly distinct nonviolent campaign of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. All of these interrelated issues are explored in what follows.

The story of Bacha Khan's nonviolent projects is a long one – from his building of free or autonomous (*azad*) schools to his numerous imprisonments to his part in the liberation struggle against British colonial rule. It is not our intention here to comprehensively retell that story. That is a task beyond both our competence and the scope of this comparatively brief chapter. Rather, the account developed below is shaped by several thematic concerns which relate to the wider issues under consideration in the present text. Our main aim is to understand how Khan conceived of and practised nonviolence, and how his understanding of nonviolence related to his experience of Islam. As will be seen, he was no speculative theologian: he composed no learned treatise on ethics or jurisprudence, and his attitudes are only to be divined less directly. This reflection includes both discussion of his famous 'nonviolent army', the Khudai Khidmatgars [Servants of God], and the ways in which his nonviolent Islam was coloured by his cultural and religious context. The lattermost issue, what is more, extends beyond Islam alone and must engage with questions of interreligious relations and syncretism – especially when we inevitably come to compare him with his Hindu friend and comrade Mahatma Gandhi. It is only once these tasks are completed that Bacha Khan can be brought fully into the present study's comparative analysis of modern Muslims' approaches to pacifism and nonviolence. Biographical details remain important to this. They are important both by way of proper contextualisation and as a part of the unavoidable task of distinguishing between what is true of Bacha Khan and what has been imposed upon him by fifty years of obfuscation and mythologisation.

#### ESCAPING THE SHADOW OF THE MAHATMA

Writing on the subject of Bacha Khan is fraught with difficulties. Not least of these is his entanglement not only with the declining British Empire but with the emerging nationalisms which would replace it. His relationships with both India and Pakistan as they emerged after Partition were at best ambivalent. He was only reluctantly a citizen of the latter, and consistently refused adoption by the former, which he saw as having betrayed both his people and the ideals of Gandhi. His hopes for some form of

'Pakhtunistan' are ambiguous and debated [lit. Land of the Pashtuns; here, Pashtun, Pakhtun, and Pathan are used interchangeably, as they were by Khan himself]. So also are their potential consequences for the existing states of Pakistan and Afghanistan, across whose Victorian Durand Line border they might cut. His ideals were a persistent stone in the shoe of those in positions of leadership.

All these regional tensions converged and became manifest upon Khan's death. The Indian government had proposed to bury his remains by Gandhi's side in India, not only paying Khan respect but also posthumously nationalising him in a fashion he had resisted while living. Khan, however, prevented this, leaving instructions that he be buried instead in the garden of his own home. The house in question was by this time no longer in a suspicious and inhospitable Pakistan [e.g. Ahmad, 2005: 26] but in war-torn Afghanistan's Jalalabad. Political leaders from Kabul to Islamabad to New Delhi strove to prevent one another from capitalising on the event, shoring up the militarised defensive lines which Khan had always regarded as calamitously unnecessary. Yet closer to the ground, the enormous esteem in which the late Bacha Khan was held resulted in an unprecedented ceasefire in the 'Soviet-Afghan war so that mourners could safely traverse the distance between Peshawar [in Pakistan] and Jalalabad [in Afghanistan]' [Banerjee, 2000: 2]. This procession at once embodied all that Khan had worked for – being pious, nonviolent, and heedless of colonial borders – while its ephemerality illustrated just how far that dream was from its realisation. Events of recent years have only made it seem more elusive still. In late January 2012, four members of the Pakistani Taliban gunned down dozens of students in Charsadda at a university named in Bacha Khan's honour. The invidious honorific of 'Frontier Gandhi' once bestowed upon Khan as a mark of respect (however condescending) came to have 'derogatory connotations for chauvinists in modern-day Pakistan' [Banerjee, 2000: 146].

Questions regarding the distorting roles of nationalist ideologies (be they Indian, Pakistani, Afghan, or Pashtun) in Khan's biography and the historiography of his movement must be asked repeatedly throughout this discussion. But reckoning with such challenges is not a task unique to the researcher into Bacha Khan. All history-writing is by its nature enmeshed with power, imagination, and illusion. All attentive reading of history must by necessity entail an element of detective work; of scepticism, selection, and judgement. But Bacha Khan's case is made more difficult by a fact beyond his notoriety – one which amplifies those competing national narratives. The study of Bacha Khan presents in

some respects the polar opposite challenge to those encountered elsewhere in the present study. Some Muslim proponents of nonviolence analysed in this book, such as Wahiduddin Khan [see Chapter 5] and Jawdat Said [see Chapter 6], wrote a great deal yet have been the subjects of relatively little reflection in the secondary literature. They wrote more, in other words, than they were written about. Bacha Khan is quite the reverse. While Khan spoke often, and certainly acted to great effect, he wrote only the occasional letter. Even his autobiography, which we turn to frequently below, was dictated and translated (to Kanwar Bhan Narang and by Helen Bouman respectively). This appears not to have been a coincidence but a reflection of both his comparatively modest learning and his sometimes brusquely taciturn manner. ‘Unlike Gandhi or Nehru, he was neither a man of Western learning nor a prolific writer. In fact, he was, as Aijaz Ahmad has described him, “a man of very large silences”’ [Bala, 2013: 135]. It is perhaps true to say that ‘[t]here is no Indian leader of his stature about whom we know so little’ [Ahmad, 2005: 23]. To make matters worse, it has been recorded that ‘[t]he British and later the Government of Pakistan systematically destroyed most documents and material records of [Bacha Khan’s] movement’ [Bala, 2013: 136].

This is not to say that we know nothing. Nor is it to claim that biographies of Bacha Khan are entirely lacking. There are indeed several, and though their quality naturally varies, some are of a high standard. The most authoritative biographies of Bacha Khan available today are those of Mukulika Banerjee [2000] and Dinanath Gopal Tendulkar [1967]. Only the latter of these, which also draws heavily on Bacha Khan’s own dictated memoirs, is the work of a historian contemporary to its subject. More than this, it is the work of a leading biographer, not only of Bacha Khan but also of the renowned Mahatma Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Published on behalf of the Gandhi Peace Foundation, his *Abdul Ghaffar Khan: Faith Is a Battle* was completed following the same author’s eight-volume biography of Gandhi entitled *Mahatma* [Tendulkar, 1967: xiii; Tendulkar, 1951–1954]. Its author did so, moreover, on the explicit instruction of Gandhi’s political heir, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru [Tendulkar, 1967: xiii]. Indeed, the publisher’s blurb urges that ‘[t]his book can truly be described as the ninth volume of *Mahatma*’. ‘The life story of one forms a natural complement to the life story of the other’, in the words of Jawaharlal Nehru’s daughter and herself twice Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, in her foreword to Tendulkar’s *Faith is a Battle*.

The founding biographical text on Bacha Khan arises, in other words, from what one would now call the field of Gandhi studies. More than this, it derives from the work of people with a close personal and political connection to Gandhi himself. This fact is only underscored by the fact that subsequent major biographies were composed by Eknath Easwaran [1999] and Rajmohan Gandhi [2008]: the former from his youth an admiring student of the Mahatma, and the latter Gandhi's own grandson. Banerjee's more dispassionate anthropological account [Banerjee, 2000], by contrast, was published over a decade after Bacha Khan's death. It is not limited to its considerable documentary and archival resources, however. It also incorporates a great deal of oral history based on interviews with surviving members of Bacha Khan's seventeen-year-long nonviolent movement the Khudai Khidmatgar – albeit sadly with only one of the great many women who together played a sizeable role in it [Banerjee, 2000: 97–98]. We learn about Khan sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly – but there remains a good deal to uncover before we can undertake a thorough analysis of his relationship with pacifism and nonviolence.

Bacha Khan was born in the village of Utmanzai, in the Hashtangar (or Hashtnagar) district of Charsadda, which was at the time part of the Indian North-West Frontier Province and roughly coextensive with modern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. There he was the son of 'Behram Khan, a rich landlord' [Tendulkar, 1967: 13]. The precise date of Bacha Khan's birth is unclear, with Khan himself recalling that 'in those days it was not the custom in our families to keep a record of the date and year of the birth of one's children ... But I have good reason to believe that I was born in 1890' [Khan, 1969: 9]. This is nonetheless somewhat dubious, as the chronological accuracy of Khan's dictated autobiography is questionable. Elsewhere, for instance, he gives 1926 for no less momentous a year than that of both his once in a lifetime Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca and the unexpected death of his wife. Significantly, he describes his Hajj as taking place in the high summer of 'the year when Saudi Arabia had taken possession of Mecca' [Khan, 1969: 84–85]. It suffices here to point out that the Saudi armies in fact conquered Mecca from the Hashemites on 13 October 1924. Irrespective of precise chronology, it is in any event clear that by the turn of the century the young Khan had been sent to learn first with a 'practically illiterate' [Khan, 1969: 12] local *mullah* and ultimately to a Protestant Mission School. Tendulkar [1969: 17] records that Khan was the first in Hashtangar to be sent to a school (though his elder brother [Khan Abdul Jabbar Khan, d. 1958] in fact proceeded him), while others point out that at the time of Khan's birth 'the whole of

NWFP [North-West Frontier Province] had less than a hundred school matriculates' [Ahmad, 2005: 31]. Khan's education may or may not have been of outstanding quality, but it was certainly exceptional. Awareness of this fact, and the pedagogical duty to share his good fortune by educating his neighbours, would shape his later life. 'My first task, as I saw it, would be to try and eliminate illiteracy' [Khan, 1969: 29].

Khan's upbringing led him initially to a period as a day scholar in Aligarh [Khan, 1969: 22] and inclined him to aspire to enlist with the prestigious regiment the Corps of Guides. He soon turned firmly against this course of action, however, as his subaltern status as a second-class 'native' subject of Britain dawned on him:

My friend [in Peshawar] was bare-headed [i.e. clean-shaven] ... When the English lieutenant saw this he became furious and cried: 'Really! You damn Sardar Saheb! So you want to be an Englishman, do you?' My friend turned deadly pale but he did not have the courage to reply. The incident left a very deep impression on me. Had not [my servant] Barani Kaka always told me of the respect one was treated with 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 any employment with the British ... because it did not give one any respect. In fact, it made one a slave and one risked getting insulted in the bargain. [Khan, 1969: 20–21]

This impression of the colonial British as contemptuous and condescending would not have the opportunity of being overturned until very much later in his life, by a meeting with the Friends of Peace Society in London [Tendulkar, 1967: 520]. Though Khan's father had wished him to follow in his brother's footsteps and continue his studies in England, his mother forbade him – apparently for fear that he would like his elder brother marry an Englishwoman [Gandhi, 2008: 44]. Having sons study engineering and medicine was surely a source of pride for her, but having them settle down on the other side of the globe was a bridge too far. This episode would mark a second turning point for Khan, both in maintaining his distance from the British and in focusing his attention closer to home:

But whatever I said, my mother would not agree to my going ... I loved my mother very much, and she was extremely fond of me. How could I go to England without her consent? So I gave up the idea of going abroad and decided that henceforth I would devote myself to the service of my country and my people – the service of God and humanity. [Khan, 1969: 23]

Bacha Khan's campaign of service [*khidmah*] began with the setting up of schools for the region's children: 'to my mind', he said to his

father, ‘educating the people and serving the nation is as sacred a duty as *namaz* [prayer]’ [Khan, 1969: 58]. These free or independent [*azad*] schools distinguished themselves from those few schools administered by the British in that they used the local vernacular Pashto rather than English. Non-English teaching had been suppressed in the region since the educational reforms of the mid-nineteenth century instigated by Lord Macauley – a man who infamously considered that ‘a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia’ [Macauley, 1965]. Bacha Khan did not share this view. ‘You call yourself a good Afghan and you can’t even speak your own language?’ [Khan, 1969: 51–52], Khan chides children and Afghanistan’s King Amanullah Khan [d. 1960] alike. Bacha Khan meanwhile admired Punjabi Sikhs whose exceptional devotion he attributed to their ability to pray in their own ‘mother tongue’ [Khan, 1969: 74]. For Khan, education in the Pashto language was at once a religious and a national obligation – a necessary element of his people’s spiritual renewal and a requirement for their survival [Khan, 1969: 88–89]. The project of moral improvement which lies at the heart of Khan’s understanding of nonviolence was very much bound up with a sense of the self as member of a distinct culture – which one is therefore obligated to protect. His attempts to fulfil this duty, however, repeatedly fell afoul not only of conservative clerical criticism but also of British suspicion.

That suspicion was only intensified by Khan taking out subscriptions to anti-colonial journals including Maulana Abul Kalam Azad’s *al-Hilāl* [‘the crescent moon’]. These called not only for independence from Britain but pan-Islamist support for the ailing Ottoman Empire which Britain was in the process of dismembering. This was the so-called Khilafat Movement, of which Khan would himself become president of the provincial organising committee in 1921. ‘The police and the C.I.D. [Criminal Investigations Department, plainclothes detectives] knew and blacklisted the names of all subscribers to *Al Hilal*’ [Khan, 1969: 30]. Khan was soon identified as a subversive, pan-Islamist threat to public order. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the British authorities had granted themselves wide authority through the Frontier Crimes Regulation Act to police what they saw as potential sedition. The so-called Rowlatt Act (the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act of 1919), identified with British judge Sidney Rowlatt, deepened both those powers and popular resentment of them in allowing for indefinite detention without trial. Khan would over the course of his



life become very familiar with the provisions of such ‘black laws’ [Khan, 1969: 24]:

There was another section of this [Frontier Crimes Regulation] Act, known as Section 40 [‘Security and surveillance for the prevention of murder or culpable homicide or the dissemination of sedition’; see Hopkins, 2015]. This Section 40 was supposedly concerned with the punishment of crimes, but the British always used it against political prisoners. And leave alone the British, Pakistan [where the Act remained in effect until 2018] is using this Act against patriotic Pathans even today ... I and thousands of my fellow-workers were put in the prison under this Section 40. [Khan, 1969: 25]

‘On the eleventh of December 1921 I was sentenced to three years rigorous imprisonment under Section 4[0] of Frontier Crime Regulation’ [Khan, 1969: 58]. Yet as a result of the British authorities’ use of anti-sedition legislation against him, Khan’s imprisonments brought him into contact with fellow political detainees. These included Khilafat and Congress movement-leaders as well as Sikh proponents of the Akali Movement which had arisen following the infamous British Brigadier Reginald Dyer’s 1919 Amritsar (or Jallianwala Bagh) Massacre of peaceful protestors against the draconian Rowlatt Act. These Sikhs in particular greatly impressed Khan in both their pious devotion and their fearless use of nonviolent methods – in which he also desired to take part [Khan, 1969: 76]. ‘A great feeling of power and strength had taken possession of the Sikhs, and the worse they were treated the stronger and more powerful they felt’ [Khan, 1969: 71]. While the figure of Gandhi (whom Khan would not meet until several years later) casts an outsize shadow over the mythology of Bacha Khan’s nonviolent mission, this earlier experience seems likely to have been a formative one. Indeed, Khan’s ultimate combination of martial discipline, religious devotion, and ethno-linguistic nationalism bears at least as much comparison with Punjabi Sikh non-violent campaigns as it does with those of their more famous Hindu contemporaries.

Khan’s cultural reform projects – from his *azad* schools to his later Pashto-language journal *Pakhtun* – continued during his incarcerations. During his periods of liberty, he built links with sympathetic leaders at Deoband and attended meetings of the Khilafat and Congress movements. In 1928, the year of *Pakhtun*’s first publication [Khan, 1969: 88], he spent time with Sir Muhammad Iqbal in the Punjab. In contradistinction to his more dismissive Khilafat colleagues, Khan esteemed the poet-philosopher highly. He would later wryly recount how ‘the same Punjabi (now Pakistani) leaders and newspapers who did not have a good word

for Dr Iqbal when he was alive, never tired of singing his praises now that he is no more' [Khan, 1969: 91]. Khan then went on to meet Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru for the first time, this time in Lucknow – and notably many years after his nonviolent work had begun. The latter was already an acquaintance of Khan's elder brother during their time in England [Khan, 1969: 91–92], and it was with Nehru that Khan initially struck up a friendship. His subsequent meetings with the Khilafat's famous Ali brothers in Delhi was less convivial, with Khan forming a negative impression of Shaukat Ali and Muhammad Ali Jauhar purportedly remarking that '[w]e don't really care for Pathans, you know!' [Khan, 1969: 92]. By the end of the year, Khan had attended the simultaneous conferences of both anti-colonial movements, held concurrently in Calcutta. Gandhi's calm composure when heckled at the Congress sessions much impressed Khan. 'If only our Muslim leaders could remain as calm and unperturbed as Gandhiji, the leader of the Hindus' [Khan, 1969: 100]. By contrast, when Khan recounted this positive experience and compared it favourably with the more acrimonious atmosphere in the moribund Khilafat's meetings,

Mohammed Ali [Jauhar] Saheb did not react as we had hoped he would. He became very annoyed and said: 'And who do you think you are, you Pathans from the back of beyond, to come and tell me how to behave?' Then he got up and left the room. We were very disappointed and hurt. After that I did not want to attend the Khilafat Conference any more. [Khan, 1969: 100]

This anecdote, occurring on the eve of the establishment of the Khudai Khidmatgar nonviolent 'army', is relevant to our present account for a number of reasons. It dates Khan's first interactions with some of the most prominent figures in the independence movement: Iqbal, the Ali brothers, Gandhi and Nehru. It demonstrates something of the degree to which the independence movement comprised numerous overlapping and sometimes opposing elements. And this is to say nothing of its third great wheel, the separatist Muslim League which Khan would to his considerable cost spend decades opposing. Finally, it illustrates the bigoted disdain in which Khan and his confederates were held on account of their ethnicity – not only by the British but by other South Asians. That ethnicity – and that prejudice – are not incidental to the manner in which Khan would develop his nonviolent Islam and the organisation which would come to embody it. Rather, they are essential to it.

The Pashtuns with whom Bacha Khan identified were (and to a considerable extent remain) subject to crude and derogatory stereotyping.

Prejudices regarding the purportedly congenital character of the ‘Warlike Pathan’ are not subtle in their occurrence throughout the writing on Bacha Khan. ‘Every [Pathan] man is a soldier’, declares his most influential biographer, in unabashed defiance of obvious fact [Tendulkar, 1967: 5]. His otherwise appreciative Indian biographers have tended to unquestioningly share the view of Pashtun culture Lord Irwin expressed in his epigraph. As a consequence, they present Khan as an ‘aberrant’ [Bala, 2013: 131] exception to the rule of his ‘vigorous but indiscriminate people’ [Easwaran, 1999: 196]. Rather than challenge their bigoted preconceptions, many saw him as an exception which proved the rule. This is a tendency only exacerbated by the prevalence of hagiography and ‘Great Man’ historiography on this subject. Juxtaposing the peaceful Khan with his violent neighbours makes him appear to stand out more dramatically as the uniquely heroic giant demanded by some genres of writing. ‘Almost without exception, every historical account of the Khudai Khidmatgar employs a narrative that begins with highlighting how the Pashtun culture traditionally glorified violence and revenge’ [Bala, 2013: 137]. The caricature of Pashtun culture with which Khan had to contend – even when dealing with close allies such as Mahatma Gandhi – was often as crude as it was dehumanising. In an indicative incident, Khan recalls how a Hindu fellow-prisoner with whom he was on good terms innocently asked him whether it was true that Pathans drink human blood. Khan tries to turn this into a joke (replying, ‘Oh yes! Frequently! Because it is delicious!’) but nonetheless resents the suggestion, attributing it to a ‘false impression the British had given the Hindus of us’ [Khan, 1969: 75]. Like all widespread prejudices, it is impossible to fully resist its internalisation. Though he repeatedly bemoans this ‘false impression’ of his ‘gentle, gallant’ people [Khan, 1969: 123, 125], Bacha Khan himself often reproduces it in his memoirs – lamenting the ostensible fact that ‘Pathans were inclined to be violent’, with a ‘habit of taking revenge’ [Khan, 1969: 96–97]. ‘We would have fared ill if we had not learnt the lessons of non-violence. We are born fighters and we keep the tradition by fighting among ourselves ... [Thus] ... this non-violence has come to us as a positive deliverance’ [Khan quoted in Tendulkar, 1967: 295].

#### PATHAN WAYS

If the stereotype of the ‘Warlike Pathan’ has a single watchword, it is *Pakhtunwali*: ‘Pakhtunwali, sometimes called the Pathan code, rules supreme. Its first commandment is *badal* or *badla*, that is revenge’

[Tendulkar, 1967: 7]. *Pakhtunwali* [lit. the way of the Pakhtun] is in point of fact a general term which stands not for a single normative principle but instead denotes decentralised Pashtun customary law. Contemporary academic studies [such as Benson and Siddiqui, 2014] give a more nuanced and lifelike account of this dynamic cultural institution than the caricatures found in Khan's biographies. As subject to change as are all living traditions, it typically embraces a variety of practices. These do indeed include *badal*. This is, however, more accurately translated as 'proportional retribution' than as 'revenge', and includes not only exhortation to but also limitations on retaliation (while appealing to several Quranic verses on the principle of 'an eye for an eye', e.g. 2:194; 16:126; 42:40) and indeed nonviolent restitution. Yet the *Pakhtunwali* likewise encompasses the *jirga* [council of elders], *thega* or *kanrrey* [truce for third party dispute resolution], *nanawatay* [seeking forgiveness, lit. 'coming in'], *melamastya* [hospitality], and *panah* [asylum, protecting guests with one's life]. *Pakhtunwali* was not the damning Mark of Cain described in the secondary literature on Bacha Khan, at once the root and result of prodigious Pathan brutishness. Rather, it is better understood as the customary ethico-legal repertoire common to Bacha Khan and his neighbours. Much of Khan's success may be attributed to his use of that language to express a nonviolent moral stance – transforming it in the process [Daud, 2019: 29].

Though we will later discuss speculation regarding the syncretic or mimetic element of Khan's Islamic nonviolence, the founding role of the Pashtun symbols and cultural mores connoted by *Pakhtunwali* is difficult to deny. 'Badhshah Khan drew not on Gandhian thought, but rather on elements of Islam and *Pukhtunwali* in order to persuade his followers of the rightness of non-violence' [Banerjee, 2000: 17]. The resultant movement has for this reason been described as 'an excellent example of how a strong culture of nonviolent resistance can be built by integrating people's original cultural and religious elements into the nonviolent struggle' [Sørensen and Vinthagen, 2012: 455]. Several of Khan's biographers narrate an incident where some of his followers forcefully wrested weapons from their opponents, to which Khan responded with horror and an extreme three-day fast, taking only water and salt [Tendulkar, 1967: 230; Gandhi, 2008: 117]. This was not an entirely normal religious practice. While a three-day fast is indeed a conventional form for expiation of the sin of oath-breaking [*kaffārah*], this is typically in atonement for one's own wrongdoings rather than those of a third party as 'no soul shall bear the burden of another' [Quran 35:18, 6:164]. Indeed, in its

apparent extension after sunset, Khan's '*kaffārah*' (as well as other fasts which he defended as Islamic [e.g. Tendulkar, 1967: 174]) constituted a variety typically prohibited in Islamic law [*al-wiṣāl*] on the basis of Prophetic *ḥadīth* [e.g. *Ṣaḥīḥ* Bukhārī *ḥadīth* no. 1961].

Yet Khan's prodigious fasting was as much political and diplomatic as it was spiritual. Khan's was simultaneously a gesture of vicarious penance on behalf of his followers and a humiliating punishment of them in thwarting their customary duty of hospitality and care towards him as their protected guest. While questionable in terms of mainstream Islamic law, it was an effective mobilisation of *Pakhtunwali* codes of honour to both discipline and demonstrate the power of nonviolence. *Pakhtunwali* was, in other words, not simply an obstacle to Khan's nonviolence but also a powerful element of its embodiment. In fact, other scholars have gone so far as to attribute the relative absence of communal violence in his region during Partition in 1947 (in dramatic contradistinction to neighbouring Punjab) directly to Khan's reformulation of *Pakhtunwali*. 'The traditional values of the Pashtoon society, which were utilized by the Khudai Khidmatgar leadership, prevented the use of violence against the non-Muslims who inhabit their area' [Shah, 2013: 117]. Khan likewise recalls with pride the '[t]en thousand *Khudai Khidmatgars*, in their red uniforms [who] had arrived in Peshawar to protect the Hindus [from intercommunal violence]' [Khan, 1969: 202].

Bacha Khan's reinterpretation of *Pakhtunwali* reaches its apogee in the nonviolent army of the Khudai Khidmatgar. Founded in 1929 [Khan, 1969: 96], this organisation would replace and expand his earlier but more limited organising efforts such as the Anjuman Islah ul-Afaghina [Society for the Reform of Afghans] and the Zalmu Jirga [Youth League] [Shah, 2013: 97]. Its name – Servants of God – sent an overt religious message while also signifying a national and political dimension. 'Servant of God' was rhetorically positioned in opposition to the common phrase 'Government Servant' [e.g. Khan, 1969: 197], with the implication that one must choose whether to serve Britain or to serve God. Its aims were thus at the same time those of the spiritual reform of the individual and society and of opposition to British rule. Nonviolence was central to its ethos. Here Bacha Khan favoured the Pashto expression '*adam-e tashaddud*' [Gandhi, 2008: 91]: literally the state of being devoid of violence or vehemence. While the Gandhian Sanskrit terms of the wider independence movement were not strictly excluded, the journals and pamphlets of the movement 'more frequently use the [Quranic] term *sabr* (forbearance, steadfastness, restraint) [which we have already seen

employed by Amadou Bamba] than the [Sanskrit] term ahimsa [non-harm]' [Bala, 2013: 142]. Unlike some of the more thoroughgoing renunciates who followed the Mahatma, let alone devotees of Christian or Buddhist monasticism, moreover, the Khudai Khidmatgars were not expected to abandon their occupations or other obligations. Their participation was expected to add to and transform their lives in the community, not to substitute for them: itself another echo of the approach taken by Bamba in Senegal [Chapter 1]. 'The *Khudai Khidmatgar* continued to be housewives, laborers, farmers, or small traders whenever they were not picketing, demonstrating, and attending camps or spending time in jails' [Bala, 2013: 149]. In this, the movement reflected both its character as a voluntary social work organisation and the broad tendency within historical Muslim religious organisations. One may recognise continuities in it with long-standing habits from Quranic rejections of monasticism [57:27] to the Sufi orders' overwhelming preference for engagement with the social world over prolonged isolation from it.

While the Khudai Khidmatgars may have been characteristically Muslim in rhetoric and in organising culture, the movement was inclusive. Membership was offered to anyone who could internalise the commitment to nonviolence and make common cause. Their numbers are difficult to ascertain, but it is understood that at their peak they numbered at least 100,000 [e.g. Sørensen and Vinthagen, 2012: 453]. Old and young were welcome, and in spite of the overtly Muslim language and symbols of the movement, Sikhs and Hindus also took part. Both men and women furthermore played active roles in the movement. 'The men wore red uniforms and the women black' [Tendulkar, 1967: 60] – giving rise to their sobriquet of 'Redshirts'. Part of the impetus behind this nickname (other than the contemporary popularity of Mussolini's Blackshirts, Hitler's Brownshirts, and the Blueshirts of the Spanish Falange), seems to have begun as a British attempt at portraying the movement as influenced by 'The Reds' of Soviet Bolshevism [Shah, 2013: 111]. 'Preposterously inaccurate' [Banerjee, 2000: 18] British archival records would seem to indicate that this was indeed a genuine concern on the part of the authorities. British tabloid newspapers echoed and amplified such fears, with *The Express* accusing Khan of fomenting 'Holy War' and the historically pro-fascist *Daily Mail* designating him 'an outpost of the Soviet republic' [Easwaran, 1999: 134].

The Khudai Khidmatgars were not, however, by any means a communist movement and 'Badshah Khan's rhetoric in respect of class inequality was thus always temperate' [Banerjee, 2000: 63]. He often criticised the iniquities

of the holders of power – be it political, economic, or religious. But he offered little in the way of explicit systematic critique of the structures which empowered them, let alone propose alternative models to replace them. He cites neither Marx nor Engels; neither Lenin, nor Stalin, nor Mao. On the contrary, both the religious and the national forms of solidarity which he invoked cut across and obscured class lines – one reason why these are forms of identity generally favoured by right-wing and anti-communist movements elsewhere. The evils Bacha Khan wished to combat tended to be either spiritual (notably ignorance, selfishness, and hatred) or practical (particularly poverty, poor schools, and inadequate infrastructure). Rarely was he concerned with their confluence in what one might understand as the structural, the ideological, or the Foucauldian workings of power-knowledge. He hoped to feed the hungry, to educate the ignorant, and to reconcile the antagonistic rather than to deconstruct the basic assumptions of private ownership or social hierarchy. His nonviolent campaign of moral improvement had a clear social dimension, in other words, but not a sociological one. One might in this respect contrast his approach to that of later nonviolent thinkers and activists discussed in this study, such as Ali Shariati [see Chapter 4] and Jawdat Said [see Chapter 6], who had precisely such sociological perspectives and such revolutionary aims. Nevertheless, it is suggested later in this chapter that Khan's praxis with respect to violence and gender in particular are indeed understandable as beginning to offer a critical response to the dominant social imaginaries of his time.

In several respects, comparisons may be drawn between the Khudai Khidmatgars and other socially conscious religious movements already present in the region – not least Sufi and Sikh traditions, or indeed the Christian Methodists [e.g. Bala, 2013: 145, 153]. The Khudai Khidmatgars' combination of religion with social work, community kitchens, and a pronounced ethno-linguistic identity attract one to the parallel with the sorts of Sikh activism which we have seen impress Bacha Khan almost a decade earlier. In the Khudai Khidmatgars' adoption of ostensibly military habits and aesthetics – including uniforms, regular drilling, and calisthenics – it mirrors both the Sikh Khalsa and the Methodist Salvation Army. Yet whereas the Salvation Army's activities in the region were focused more on 'helping work' and charity than on spiritual reform, the Khudai Khidmatgars' devotion to overcoming ego is most comparable to the disciplines of the Sufi orders. Indeed, several writers on the movement use characteristically Sufi language to describe this effort: *jihād-e akbar*, the Greater Struggle within oneself [e.g. Banerjee, 2000: 148; Daud, 2019: 29], which we have already

encountered as Amadou Bamba's *al-jihād al-akbar*. While the phrase is not exclusive to Sufis, and while Khan's own connection with Sufism may be relatively tenuous, it underlines the centrality of personal moral and spiritual improvement as core to the understanding of Islamic nonviolence shared within his movement.

The holistic religio-political ambitions of the movement have already been remarked upon. It was 'not just a political movement . . . It was also a spiritual movement. It was the movement that taught the Pathans love and brotherhood, and inspired them with a sense of unity, patriotism and the desire to service' [Khan, 1969: 144]. In this respect, it might also be compared to the contemporaneous Society of the Muslim Brothers, founded in Egypt by another reform-minded educationalist. Its leader, Hassan al-Banna [d. 1949], after all famously declared his Muslim Brotherhood 'a Salafiyya message, a Sunni way, a Sufi truth, a political organisation, an athletic group, a cultural-education union, an economic company, and a social idea' [quoted in Mitchell, 1993: 14]. The Khudai Khidmatgars' oath as it is recalled in Khan's dictated memoirs opens the present section (Tendulkar, 1967: 59; Shah, 2013: 106; Daud, 2019: 29; Gandhi, 2008: 83–84; see also Bala, 2013: 140–141) and gives a good sense of this combination of moral reform, nonviolent national liberation, and a culture of service. A more contemporary text drawn from police records is also available, and it is notable that this version is written in more universalistic language than the more widely reproduced but less well-attested form. References to God remain frequent, but those to 'Pathans' (and indeed 'revenge') are absent. This reads as follows:

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 'para jamba' (party feeling), enmity with or wilfully oppose anybody; 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 apologize during the fight.
5. I will always obey every lawful order of every officer of mine.
6. I will always abide by the principle of nonviolence.
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 toward mere show or becoming an office-holder. [Shah, 2013: 106]



## SERVICE AND DISOBEDIENCE

Those who had undertaken this oath set about not only constructive social work – from education to food distribution to street-sweeping – but also campaigns of civil disobedience targeting the British colonial administration. These included the staging of ‘road blocks, conducting patrols, preventing clashes between rival factions, and taking the lead in the so-called fill the jail (*jail bharo*) campaigns ... [as well as] the boycott of British goods’ [Bala, 2013: 133]. In this, it reflected not only the *swarāj* methods employed by the followers of Gandhi across the Indian subcontinent but also earlier disobediences in more distant parts of the British Empire. The ‘boycott’ was itself named after Captain Charles Boycott [d. 1897] – an English land-agent targeted for public ostracism in Ireland’s western County Mayo during the nineteenth-century agrarian Land War led by pro-independence figures such as Michael Davitt [d. 1906] and Charles Stewart Parnell [d. 1891]. The nonviolent methods adopted by the Khudai Khidmatgars, rather than being the mystifying aberration implied by racialised accounts of the Pathan people, are readily comparable to parallel activities against the British Empire not only in India but around the globe. Their methods were, moreover, many.

During the 1930–1934 civil disobedience campaigns, the Khudai Khidmatgar used the following methods:

- refusing to pay taxes or rent to the government
- picketing of government offices
- boycotting of foreign goods (cloth, etc.), and a full-scale boycott of liquor stores in Peshawar
- non-cooperation with the government administration and contracted services, such as delivering mail
- refusing to settle criminal and civil cases in government courts, opting instead for village councils
- commemorating anniversaries of important events; for example, the massacre in the Kissa Khani Bazaar in Peshawar in April 1930, when 200 demonstrators were killed by troops under British command encouraging officials in the villages who worked as tax collectors or other state workers to resign or be socially ostracized. [Raqib, 2009: 112]

It has been argued that this peaceful approach not only ‘morally limit[ed] the state’s ability to exercise violence on the whole community, but also enabled the mobilisation of women who would not have taken part in violent political activity on a large scale’ [Daud, 2019: 28]. Khan himself called often for women to take part in the movement, as it has already been noted they did. He furthermore repeatedly published articles

critical of *pardah* [female seclusion] while chiding his male followers for seeking only their own freedom and not that of their female comrades. An article in his journal *Pakhtun*, attributed only to ‘Nagina, a Pakhtun sister’, is indicative: ‘Except for the Pakhtun, the women have no enemy. He is clever but ardent in suppressing women . . . O Pakhtun, when you demand your freedom, why do you deny it to women?’ [quoted in Gandhi, 2008: 78]. Even if Khan did not himself write these words under a pseudonym (which it is entirely possible he did), he expressed the same sentiment publicly in his speeches. At a meeting organised by the women of Bhaizai in 1931, for instance, he would praise their work for liberation while admitting his own part in their oppression:

In the Holy Qur’an 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. But thank God we have realised that our gain and loss, progress and downfall, are common. [Gandhi, 2008: 97–98]

Khan’s case for the liberation of women was frequently couched in appeals to the good of the nation at large. It might therefore be open to some of the objections levelled by Leila Ahmed [Ahmed, 1992] against early Egyptian feminist Qāsim Amīn [d. 1908]. That is, treating women’s emancipation as a means to men’s ends, merely making them into a better class of servant. Yet the personal guilt which Khan expresses implies a more serious moral commitment to challenging social norms than mere political expediency. This is not, however, to say that pragmatism played no role in his thinking whatsoever – be it in his opposing of unjust gender roles or in his nonviolence more broadly.

For his own part, Bacha Khan was explicit regarding not only the moral and spiritual preferability of nonviolence but also its practical superiority over an armed confrontation with the British:

There were two freedom movements in our province, one believed in violence and the other in non-violence . . . The British had been able to deal with the violent movement by taking violent countermeasures. But they had not been able to suppress the non-violent movement in spite of all their unspeakable cruelty and innumerable arrests and imprisonments. The violent movement had created fear and cowardice in the people’s minds, it had weakened people’s courage and morale. But the non-violent movement had made people fearless and brave, and inspired them with a high sense of morality. The violent movement had preached hatred, but the non-violent movement preached love and brotherhood. It spoke of a new life for the Pathans, a life of dedication to their nation and to their brethren. It spoke of a great and splendid revolution in art, in culture, in poetry, in their whole social life. The truth is, of course, that violence is born of hatred, and non-violence is born of love . . . [In contrast to the violent movement, the public] saw

that in the non-violent movement everyone tried to avoid trouble, everyone tried to prevent harm being done to the innocent people. They saw that our movement was only concerned with the welfare of the country, and that made them sympathetic toward our movement. [Khan, 1969: 143–144]

Khan's commitment to this policy on pragmatic as well as moral grounds is evidenced in his response to a *jirga* [council meeting] which proposed the sabotage of British infrastructure – an act which could not automatically be attributed to the perpetrator:

I told the Jirga that this would be allowed only on the condition that the saboteur himself went to the police and told them what he had done. This would make him develop moral courage and this would be an inspiration to other workers. Also, no innocent people would come under suspicion and the police would have no excuse for hunting and harassment. [Khan, 1969: 160–161]

This account of Bacha Khan's nonviolent campaign for reform, revival, and independence might appear naïvely Panglossian were it not for its passing recognition of 'unspeakable cruelty'. This there was, though Khan himself is loath to describe in detail what he calls 'unprintable cruelty and shameless humiliation' [Khan, 1969: 145] meted out by the British against the Khudai Khidmatgars. It is clear that the British often met nonviolence with violence – most spectacularly during the 'reign of terror' [Shah, 2013: 88] following the massacre of several hundred people in Peshawar's Qissa Khani Bazaar. 'Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims stood shoulder to shoulder, forming a human wall . . . the [colonial] police opened fire and a number of people fell as martyrs for our cause' [Khan, 1969: 103]. These victims of imperial brutality were soon famous across India as the '*San Tees Shaheedan* [Martyrs of 1930] . . . [or] *Shuhada i Qissa Khani* [Martyrs of Qissa Khani]' [Shah, 2013: 98]. But beyond the use of lethal force, it has been observed that the British response to Bacha Khan's nonviolent campaign stood out for the sexualised form which state violence often took [Sørensen and Vinthagen, 2012: 444–445]. The Khudai Khidmatgars' combination of military machismo, Pathan pride, and devout nonviolence presented itself as a grotesque contradiction to the expectations of the established authorities – transmuting familiar forms of forceful masculinity into what they could only (mis)understand as weakly passive femininity. The manfulness of Bacha Khan and his comrades presented a challenge to the British image of manliness and elicited a response of sexual panic and homophobic fury. Drawing on Ashis Nandy's *An Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* [1983], Banerjee explores the role of gender and sexuality

in this alarming development. 'From this perspective, the range of homoerotic and sexually shameful punishments unleashed on the Pathans appear as efforts *literally* to emasculate the Pathans as penance for their turning away from hyper-masculine violence' [Banerjee, 2000: 212–213].

The decades-long persistence of Bacha Khan and his fellow Khudai Khidmatgars in the face of the persecution to which they were subjected is certainly remarkable. Indeed, it was widely-remarked at the time:

Moreover, as the English visitors observed, despite the extreme provocation and the ready availability of arms and ammunition in the region, the creed of non-violence had been steadfastly sustained. Congress too praised the role of Badshah Khan and the KK [Khudai Khidmatgars] in pursuing protest in the Province in a non-violent way, and praised the Pathans' restraint . . . The civil disobedience campaign carried out by these *Khudai Khidmatgar* recruits between 1930 and 1934 was arguably the most heroic and extraordinary of all such episodes of the Indian nationalist movement. [Bannerjee, 2000: 71]

So extraordinary an episode calls for elaboration. We have already engaged with the dominant historiographical convention of relating their methods to the workings of specifically Pakhtun customs and recognised the nationalist rhetoric of the movement. Yet it would poorly represent the self-understanding of those involved to limit an account of their motivations to such parochial concerns. Religion is at the heart of these – and particularly an expansive Islamic religiosity. Though the movement did admit non-Muslims, it did so (as we will see later) on the understanding that they were indeed monotheist cousins of the Muslims and recipients of their own authentic revelations. The largest study in the oral history of the group concludes in no uncertain terms that they 'were certainly convinced that the inspiration for their non-violent struggle came from Islam' [Bannerjee, 2000: 149]. Bacha Khan's movement has been described by a contemporary as 'inculcating in them self-respect and the fear of God which "banishes all fear"' [Tendulkar, 1967: 60]. What is in question here is not some abstracted sense of God-consciousness, however, but a more encompassing understanding of Islam; their understanding of Islam did not only motivate them to act, it motivated them to act in some ways and not in others.

Islam as a category is both vast and various. Islam as it is experienced by a twenty-first-century astrophysicist in Connecticut may be as distinct from that of a subsistence farmer in sixteenth-century Java as they are alike. It is difficult if not impossible to disentangle it from the cultures and cases in which it manifests itself. Distinctions between 'cultural' and 'religious' elements are sometimes useful to the outside

observer but are rarely obvious or even meaningful to the subjects themselves. The present case is no exception. Evidence of this ranges from the fact that even the most austere forms of Islamic law recognise some role for local *'urf* or customary law, to the fact that 'secular' *Pakhtunwali* practices are framed in expressly religious terms. Those invoking the *Pakhtunwali* tradition of truce for conflict mediation [*thega*], for instance, traditionally approach disputants while holding a Quran upon their heads. It was upon a copy of the Quran that Khudai Khidmatgars took their oaths, and Bacha Khan's speeches are inevitably couched in the language of his and his audience's Islamic faith. Both a clear understanding of this nonviolent movement's motivations, and our own project of analysing the religious dimension of Bacha Khan's activism, calls for further examination of that faith.

#### AGAINST THE SCHOLARLY CLASS

It has already been shown that Bacha Khan did not receive a substantial traditional education in the formal Islamic sciences. His experience of 'practically illiterate' religious leaders [Khan, 1969: 12] who opposed his *azad* schools [e.g. Khan, 1969: 26] and who neglected crucial ethical obligations of the faith as he understood it did not overly incline him to regard this as a weakness on his part. Khan himself records the frustration of an *'ālim* [Islamic scholar] whom he asked to give him classes while they were imprisoned together. The latter 'soon dropped out, accusing me of giving my own interpretations to the text. He was a blind follower of tradition and [could not] appreciate an independent interpretation' [Khan, quoted in Gandhi, 2008: 70]. Khan's understanding of Islam was both idiosyncratic and uncompromising. 'It is my inmost conviction that Islam is *amal*, *yakeen*, *muhabat* [good works, conviction, and love] and without these the name "Muslim" is sounding brass and tinkling cymbal' [i.e. mere noise; Bacha Khan, quoted in Easwaran, 1999: 63]. In an echo of Sufi poetry from Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī [d. 1273] to Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī's [d. 1240] *tarjumān al-'ashwāq* [*Interpreter of Desires*], Khan declares that

[m]y religion is truth, love, and service to God and humanity. Every religion that has come into the world has brought the message of love and brotherhood. And those who are indifferent to the welfare of their fellow-men, those whose hearts are empty of love, those who do not know the meaning of brotherhood, those who harbour hatred and resentment in their hearts, they do not know the meaning of Religion. [Khan, 1969: 195]

While Khan's Islam may indeed have been seen as untutored by the scholarly class, it is of no small importance that it was so widely supported by the general public. In his speeches, Khan not only recognises the gulf between himself and that clerical class, but mobilises it as both a critique and a call to action:

We have been insulted and disgraced by religion, but I will tell you this, and I want you to listen carefully. First of all, why do religions come in the world? To teach man to be human. Whenever man has forgotten to be human the Messenger has come and brought religion into the world again. The Messenger has always come to remind mankind of the lesson they had forgotten, the lesson of love for one's country and one's fellowmen, the lesson of service to humanity. The nation that practices love and brotherhood and self-sacrifice will rise to the skies. A nation that does not know these sentiments is doomed. Religion teaches the desire to serve. What people call religion in the world today is not the religion of God and His Messengers. The Holy Prophet Mohammed came into this world and he taught us an excellent way of life. He said: 'That man is a Muslim, who never hurts anyone by word or deed, but who works for the benefit and happiness of God's creatures.' [Khan, 1969: 231]

The 'insult and disgrace by religion' which Khan regards as having been carried out by its supposed champions he elsewhere attributes explicitly to the elite's cupidity and megalomania:

What is it in people's lives that is so important that it makes them forget the teachings of the Holy Prophet? I will tell you what it is. It is greed for money, the lust for power. No nation that is greedy after money, and hungers after power will ever prosper in this world. And if we are poor and miserable today it is because of those two things. Look at the history of the Muslims. What is the result of their thirst after wealth? The Muslims became class-conscious, party-conscious and the outcome was that feud raised its ugly head among them. [Khan, 1969: 239]

It is again vital to recognise that statements such as these were not rejected but instead warmly welcomed by many tens of thousands of Muslims. One may reasonably question his orthodoxy in the terms of classical Islamic learning, but any suggestion that he did not reflect widely held (perhaps even majority) understandings of Islam is belied by historical evidence to the contrary. The same observation may also be made, *mutatis mutandis*, of the many other pacifist dissidents explored in this book who took aim at the clerical establishment [see Chapters 1, 4, and 6 and Appendix].

If the desires for wealth and power lie at the root of present-day Muslim weakness, Khan furthermore considered, then any reform of society must necessarily include the moral refinement of the individual.

His understanding of Islam was not, therefore, purely or even primarily political. His call was not only for a harmony of nonviolent means with nonviolent ends but for the fundamental alignment of both with a non-violent moral disposition – itself an approach identified by this monograph as typical of Islamic approaches to nonviolence. ‘*Adam-e tashaddud* [absence of violence or vehemence] as Khan called his ‘non-violence’, refers to the actor as much as the action:

Ours is a spiritual and moral movement which can be nurtured only by those who are patient and tolerant. One sincere worker of character strengthens the party, whereas a characterless member harms it . . . To a question, who is a true Musalman [Muslim], the Prophet replied ‘One who does not hurt another Musalman by speech or action.’ We shall have to ask ourselves how we have used our tongue and hands. Many among us perform *namaz* [prayer] and recite the Koran but hurt others with our words and deeds. How can we claim then to be Musalmans? It is not easy to be a true Musalman. That is why I am giving you time to prepare . . . I want sincere workers who would regularly and ably perform the task assigned to them. They will be trained, taught to read and write Pakhtu, and made conversant with the life and teachings of the Prophet and with the world events and history. [Bacha Khan, speech on 14 September 1946, quoted in Tendulkar, 1967: 380]

Bacha Khan’s understand of nonviolence in Islam presented itself not as an addition to the tradition but as a restoration of its true mission and its liberation from the abuses of the powerful. In this respect, one might draw comparisons with the anti-clericalisms of Ali Shariati or Jawdat Said [see Chapters 4 and 6 and Appendix], the revisionism of ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Rāziq [d. 1966] or Mahmoud Muhammed Taha [d. 1985], or even later deconstructions of epistemic power by Muhammad Arkoun [d. 2010] or Fatema Mernissi [d. 2015]. That being said, the claim to bring nothing new to religion but rather to rediscover its essentials is exceedingly common among reform movements. It is certainly the promise of modern Salafism, the very name of which explicitly stakes this claim in identifying with the initial generations of Muslims [*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*] as distinct from those who came later. Yet neither is it particular to these alone, nor even to Islam: one might for instance consider the devoutly ahistorical implications of the term ‘Fundamentalist’ in twentieth-century American Protestantism. Khan is unstintingly critical of impious religious authorities and dismissive of imitative learning. Nonetheless, his approach to nonviolence in Islam distinguishes itself from more sweeping or revolutionary projects. Khan’s attack on unjust Muslims centred on their actions and their characters rather than on their ideas, and crucially sought not to replace but to surpass these. As with the salient uses of *Pakhtunwali* and military

paraphernalia already remarked upon, Bacha Khan aimed at transforming rather than supplanting his traditions' sources of identity and pride – even when the result was so different as to baffle outside observers.

This apparent ambivalence of untraditional traditionality is at its most pronounced in relation to the question of religiously sanctioned violence. Khan was, after all, the founder of a nonviolent army: a seeming contradiction in terms. His attitude to martial traditions mirrored his relationship with Islamic religious tradition. In contradistinction to some other figures discussed in this study, Khan did not attempt either to ignore or to abrogate violent episodes in the scriptures (cf. for instance Bawa Muhaiyeddeen and Wahiduddin Khan, respectively [see Chapters 3 and 5]). His total refusal of violence was not in his view a rejection of either the theoretical possibility or the Prophetic reality of divinely sanctioned killing [*qitāl*]. Rather, it relied on the absolute precedence of nonviolence over it. He took the view that 'the Quran commands struggle for injustice in the form of Jihad . . . [yet] it also commands patience as virtue, both in triumph and in suffering . . . since it is patience which prevents hatred and aggression' [Banerjee, 2000: 147]. Bacha Khan, like the majority of the thinkers and activists discussed in the present study, engages directly with the fifth chapter of the Quran, wherein some of the strongest language both in favour and against violence can be found. Just as that Quranic chapter [*sūrat al-mā'idah*], and particularly its forty-fifth verse, 'recognizes the duty to seek justice . . . it also recommends the renunciation of retaliation for the sake of personal atonement. Revenge is honorable, but forgiveness is still more so' [Banerjee, 2000: 196]. Recalling a famous Prophetic *ḥadīth* in the *Musnad* of Aḥmad [no. 18449], Khan insists that the best and highest form of struggle (*jihād*) is not violent but nonviolent. 'I tell you that you have forgotten the teachings of your Prophet. I ask you what jihad [*jihād*] is. According to the teachings of the Prophet, jihad is to say the truth before the tyrant kings' [Bacha Khan addressing a mass meeting in the largely Pathan neighbourhood of Karachi's Dongri Maidan in 1931, quoted in Tendulkar, 1967: 85–87].

Khan does not anathematise violence or its practitioners as un-Islamic. Instead, he takes the view that they are insufficiently sincere and ambitious in their commitment to the faith. Nonviolence is presented not so much as a provocation to the faith but to its believers: as the highest and most accomplished path, which they had heretofore failed in treading. His call is less an invitation than a challenge: 'Thus, forgiving one's opponent is an act of bravery, not weakness – and that requires self-discipline' [Daud, 2019: 32–33]. 'Moral courage' [Khan, 1969: 161] is the cardinal virtue.



Bacha Khan underlines this chivalric dimension of nonviolent Islam through a conversation with the Mahatma in 1945 (which also evidences some of Gandhi's lingering ethnic stereotyping). Upon his latest release from prison, Khan describes challenging Gandhi with the claim that

'... the Pathans seem to have learned this lesson and grasped the idea of non-violence much quicker and much better than the Indians. Just think how much violence there was in India during the war, in 1942. Yet in the North West Frontier Province, in spite of all the cruelty and oppression the British inflicted upon them, not one Pathan resorted to violence, though they, too, possess the instruments of violence. How do you explain that?' Gandhiji replied: 'Non-violence is not for cowards. It is for the brave, the courageous. And the Pathans are more brave and courageous than the Hindus. That is the reason why the Pathans were able to remain non-violent.' [Khan, 1969: 193–194]

While their understanding of Islam was the central motive of Bacha Khan and the Khudai Khidmatgars, and moral courage its expression, this is not to say that they hoped for a political separation with non-Muslims. His Islam certainly guided his politics, but it did so on the level of morality and ethics rather than political tribalism. Indeed, the moral authority of his faith depended on its being above transient temporal power alignments. 'For Bacha Khan, the multi-religious secular Indian nation was a manifest reality which required no justifications in terms of Islamic theology or early Muslim history' [Ahmad, 2005: 28; cf. Daud, 2019: 27]. '[T]o the extent that he did not think of Muslims as a nation or even as a fixed and homogeneous religio-political community, he was not even a Muslim communitarian, properly speaking' [Ahmad, 2005: 29]. He was and remained implacably opposed to Partition and to the Muslim League which advocated for it – repeatedly accusing the latter of ruthlessness [Khan, 1969: 198], hooliganism [Khan, 1969: 201], deceit [Khan, 1969: 178], and complicity with the British [e.g. Khan, 1969: 110–111, 161, 175–176, 196]. 'He was a devout Muslim but never thought of Muslims as a separate political community' [Ahmad, 2005: 39]. Pragmatism also played its part in this:

[T]he division of India will result in an all-round weakness in the modern world, where no part of it will have sufficient resources to preserve its own freedom. The days of isolation are no more. A new conception of international collaboration and co-operation is seeking to be born. The Pathans hate compulsion and dictation of any type, but of their own free will, they are prepared to work in unity and co-operation with others in this country. [Bacha Khan, quoted in Tendulkar, 1967: 10]

Rather than ally with the Muslim League, it was instead with the Congress that Bacha Khan made common cause, and '[t]he merger was

beneficial for both' [Shah, 2013: 114]. He developed friendships with Congress leaders including Gandhi, Nehru, and Abul Kalam Azad, and recalls that his own presidency of the All India Congress was mooted: '[Future Prime Minister of India] Rajendra Prasad even sent me a telegram to inform me that I had been elected. But I refused. I sent a telegram saying: "I am a soldier and I am a *Khudai Khidmatgar* and I only want to serve"' [Khan, 1969: 151]. This association would ultimately end in Khan and the *Khudai Khidmatgars*' sacrifice on the altar of Partition, 'thrown to the wolves' [Khan, 1969: 204] by their erstwhile allies. Yet while it endured, Khan was surprised both by Hindu scepticism of his nonviolence and by Muslim suspicion of the Congress itself:

I am greatly surprised that the very name of the Congress scares away some of my Muslim brethren. They think the Congress is a Hindu organisation and that, therefore, they may have nothing to do with it. There never was a more incorrect description of a body which is essentially national in character . . . I want you to read the history of Islam and ask you to consider what the Prophet's mission was. It was to free the oppressed, to feed the poor and to clothe the naked. And, therefore, the work of the Congress is nothing but the work of the Prophet, nothing inconsistent with Islam . . . Then we come to the creed of non-violence. Surely there is nothing surprising in a Musalman or a Pathan like me subscribing to the creed. It is not a new creed. It was followed fourteen hundred years ago by the Prophet, all the time he was in Mecca, and it has since been followed by all those who want to throw off the oppressor's yoke. [Bacha Khan in 1931, quoted in Tendulkar, 1967: 94–95]

Those suspicions nevertheless endured on both sides of what would come to be the hard border between the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. In the latter, in particular, Bacha Khan repeatedly fell victim to ethno-religious tribalism. The accusation levelled against him by his political competitors was typically, 'You have become a Hindu' [Khan, 1969: 180], and hence loyal to India rather than Pakistan. 'The Government and people of Pakistan label us as Hindus whenever we open our mouth or move in the public' [Khan, 1969: 207; cf. Tendulkar, 1967: 522]. Characteristically, Khan tries to excuse the bigotry of his neighbours by pointing a not entirely undeserved finger of blame at the *divide et impera* machinations of imperial Britain: 'Well, take a look at me and see if I have become a Hindu? Who has the right to sit in judgement and pronounce me a Hindu? It was the British who called me a Hindu and since then nobody has been able to make me Muslim again' [Khan, 1969: 230–231]. The question of Bacha Khan's 'Hindu-ness', which he himself found so absurd, is nonetheless of interest to us here. This is not so much because it might help us to provide a more exhaustive

account of his life – which is not our aim – nor because of any important light it might shed on South Asian postcolonial politics. Rather, the question is pertinent to our reflections on the variety of principled pacifism and nonviolence in modern Islam. It is relevant for precisely the reason that both ‘un-Islamic’ influence by non-Muslims in general and by Mahatma Gandhi in particular are so reflexively suggested by those questioning the Islamic authenticity of nonviolent Muslims. One could ask for no clearer a test case for this purist discourse than Bacha Khan.

Bacha Khan raises questions regarding intercultural and interreligious relations even notwithstanding his long association with the most famous Hindu of the twentieth century. His nationalism takes vocal pride not only in the rich history of Central Asian Islam but also in the fact that his homelands had earlier generated colossi of South Asian religious civilisation. His memoirs glory in the vast Buddhas of Bamiyan (dynamited by the Taliban to global outrage in 2001) and the memory of the Śālātura-born Pāṇini: the greatest grammarian and linguist of the ancient world [Khan, 1969: 15–17]. His sense of continuity with those earlier Buddhist and Hindu ‘Pathans’ is, moreover, not purely ethnic. Rather, he takes the view that Hindus are not only fellow monotheists but recipients of pre-Quranic divine revelation: *ahl al-kitāb* or People of the Book [Gandhi, 2004: 104; Daud, 2019: 33]. ‘Hindus are no less *Ahle Kitab* than Jews and Christians ... the Hindus and their books are not mentioned in the Holy Koran because the list [therein] is not exhaustive but merely illustrative’ [Bacha Khan, quoted in Tendulkar, 1967: 173].

While this may surprise some readers, it is important to note that this argument is neither a new one nor unique to Khan. The Quran itself largely confines itself to narrating prophets from the Abrahamic tradition – though these are neither always named nor suggested to exhaust the list of messengers which God sent ‘to every nation’ [*fī kulli ummatin*; Quran 16:36]. Yet a well-known *ḥadīth* in the authoritative *Musnad* collection of Ibn Hanbal [no. 22342] records that God sent no fewer than 124,000 such prophets prior to Muḥammad: far more than the two dozen or so described in the Quranic text. Bacha Khan for his part sees no reason why these should not include the great religious leaders of South Asian religion. While this view may be eccentric to much of the Muslim scholarly class, it is not only widely held but furthermore dates back at least as far as the work of medieval astronomer and ‘father of comparative religion’ Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī [d. 1050]. The view that Hindus are ultimately monotheistic worshippers of the one godhead (Brahman or

Para Brahman) is moreover a view one also finds easily among those Hindus who reject their own characterisation as polytheists.

None of this means that Bacha Khan practised Hinduism or Buddhism, nor that he was well informed as to their nuance and variety. Though he attempted to arrange reciprocal lessons on the Quran and Gita when imprisoned with Pandit Jagat Ram [Khan, 1969: 104–105], these ‘had to be discontinued for want of more than one pupil but myself in the Gita class and for want of more than one pupil in the Koran class . . . we each of us incurred a lot of odium’ [Bacha Khan, quoted in Tendulkar, 1967: 173]. He rarely even alludes to the Gita’s contents, let alone those of the *śruti* Vedic texts with which he shows no familiarity. More common are occasional references to the Gospels, to which he was exposed by his childhood teachers at the Mission school who likewise ‘inspired in me the desire to serve God and humanity . . . the colour of service and dedication that I saw in [his teacher] Mr. Wigram and his brother, must have fallen on me, too’ [Khan, 1969: 28–29]. We have furthermore remarked repeatedly on the formative influence of (Akali Movement) Sikhs on Bacha Khan at the moment of his first embrace of nonviolence. Were a Sikh as famous for nonviolence as Gandhi, or had an independent Khalistan been established in the Punjab, one might surmise that those who accused Bacha Khan of Hinduism might instead have labelled him a Sikh. For his own part, there is no evidence of his having ever considered himself anything but a Muslim. Khan’s Islam was well disposed towards the faiths of other monotheists and confident in the belief that they posed no metaphysical challenge to it – even if his knowledge of them remained limited. This attitude is succinctly reflected in his recollection of time spent in Gandhi’s colonies:

Whenever I am at a prayer meeting in a Harijan Colony, or at Sevagram, or anywhere else, I always read first from the Holy Koran. At Sevagram, a Japanese Buddhist used to chant from his holy scripture. Then the Hindu prayers would begin. Gandhiji had the same respect for all religions, and he believed that they were all based on the same Truth. And that has always been my firm belief, too. I have studied both the Holy Koran and the Bhagavat Gita profoundly and reverently. When I was in Dera Ghazi Khan prison my Sikh fellow prisoners often read to me from the Guru Granth Saheb. I was also very interested in studying Buddhism because our people were Buddhists before they embraced Islam. But, alas, I have never come across any book on Buddhism that I could have studied. I became acquainted with the New Testament when I was at the Mission High School and in prison I used to read the Old Testament. I was also very interested in the Parsee [Zoroastrian] religion, the teachings of Zoroaster, because he was our messenger, he was born in Balkh in Afghanistan. But, again alas! until now I have not been able to find any literature about him. [Khan, 1969: 194]

Bacha Khan's ecumenism, then, had something of an *a priori* or axiomatic character: it derived less from an empirical observation of religious communities than from an abstract theological commitment to the idea that God is Truth and Truth is One. Acts by believers in other religions which conflicted with his idea of true and loving faith were attributed to other factors – such as the British manipulation we have already seen invoked repeatedly. '[L]ook at Vietnam!', he urges:

What do the Americans want there? Why do they send their armies there? The Americans are Christians, but do they act as Christians? This is why I said that what a people call religion in the world today is not the religion of God and his Messengers. This is not the religion of love, truth and service to humanity that God's Messengers have brought to the world. [Khan, 1969: 232]

The true Christians (or Muslims, or Hindus, or Buddhists) are not the perpetrators of violence and oppression, in Bacha Khan's view. Rather, they are its victims. Though his reasoning here is arguably circular, its conclusions remain for him ineluctable. The devout Muslims is doubly obligated to solidarity with these pious victims:

The Prophet teaches us to help the oppressed people and destroy the tyrants. Today the Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Parsis [Zoroastrians] and Christians are the oppressed people and the tyrant is the Government, which has deprived us all of all the rights in our country. The Muslims should help the oppressed people. [Tendulkar, 1967: 85–87]

In all of this, one might draw parallels with the ecumenism of Gandhi if Khan had not already done so for us. We began our account of Bacha Khan with a recognition of the overwhelming degree to which his biographies emanate from the circle of Mahatma Gandhi. It may indeed be true to say that 'Gandhi and Abdul Ghaffar held almost identical views on many a problem of the day and were attracted to each other intensely' [Tendulkar, 1967: 404], but this need not imply either causal precedence or qualitative hierarchy. Seeing Khan primarily as a reflection or appendage of Gandhi is a habit already widely formed by Indian Hindus during Khan's most active years, and even then he tried to discourage it. 'Congress commentators gave him the nickname "Frontier Gandhi", although Badshah Khan deplored it, feeling it created a sense of competition' [Banerjee, 2000: 145–146]. Though Khan may have rejected this title out of humility, it is difficult to disagree with Sruti Bala that it also conveys a palpably 'patronising' [Bala, 2013: 141] and condescending denial both of 'the indigenous roots of the movement, viewing it as a provincial offshoot of Gandhianism' [Bala, 2013: 131] and of its

‘indigenous historical context’ [Bala, 2013: 133]. That context, as we have already seen, is not incidental but essential to it.

#### DIVERGENT PATHS

Alone among Khan’s major biographers, Mukulika Banerjee enumerates several key differences between Khanian and Gandhian nonviolence. The first of these is their quite distinct cultural and religious backgrounds:

[It] is understandable that previous commentators have attributed the KK’s non-violent ideology to the influence of Gandhi’s thinking. This simple process of diffusion was similarly assumed by both the KK movement’s Congress allies and its Muslim League critics. In reality, however, the constituents of the KK ideology are quite otherwise. Although the KK undoubtedly drew on Congress’ experience of the precise techniques of civil disobedience, the basic underlying principle that violence must be eschewed had been grasped by Badshah Khan long before he met Gandhi, through his own reflections . . . More fundamentally, Gandhi’s philosophical inspiration for non-violence was the Gita, a text sacred to the Hindus, whereas Badshah Khan was a devout Muslim . . . So, while it would be implausible to say Gandhi’s thought and presence had no influence on Badshah Khan himself, in respect to the wider KK the main elements of the non-violent philosophy were conveyed in very different terms. [Banerjee, 2000: 146]

The differences between Bacha Khan and his Hindu friend and comrade did not stop at matters of faith and cultural background, moreover. In terms of their personal style, ‘in contrast to Gandhi, Badshah Khan was never such a remote or mysterious figure in the Pathans’ imagination . . . [Informants’ stories of him] indicate an intimacy and familiarity of a kind which did not arise in India with Gandhi the Mahatma’ [Banerjee, 2000: 131]. Khan’s methods differed markedly from those of Gandhi not only in their already-remarked discouragement of renunciation but also in seeking to ‘bolster personal belief in non-violence with the unthinking discipline and obedience of mechanical military drilling, which was very different from the more individualistic Gandhian approach’ [Banerjee, 2000: 84]. Subsequent Indian nationalist attempts to frame the ‘formation of the [Khudai Khidmatgar] movement as an army . . . as related to the Gandhian idea of the Peace Army (*Shanti Sena*)’ to combat the intercommunal violence of independence are belied by the fact that ‘the latter was indeed founded much later than the former’ [Bala, 2013: 141]. Indeed, the *Shanti Sena* was proposed by Gandhi in the year of his death and only given form a decade later under Vinayak Narahari Bhawe: post-dating Khan’s organisation (let alone its precursors) by some thirty years. If any causal connection between these

projects exists at all, one would therefore be more justified in viewing Khan as Gandhi's inspiration than the reverse.

Differences between the two nonviolence movement-leaders furthermore extended to their respective understandings of the ontological status of those victim to violence. For Gandhi, influenced both by his time in the London Vegetarian Society and Hindu belief in the transmigration of the soul [*jīva* or *ātman*] which Khan did not share, nonviolence called for a vegetarian (and ideally vegan) diet. This was in fact a discipline Gandhi urged Khan and the Khudai Khidmatgar also to adopt [Bala, 2013: 141–142]. Though the only detailed account of Bacha Khan's daily routine (by Pyarelal Nayyar [in Tendulkar, 1967: 524]) records no meat consumption, Khan himself elsewhere identifies himself as a 'meat-eater' [quoted in Gandhi, 2008: 101] – daily meat consumption being in any event a very recent development in industrial human nutrition. On another occasion, Khan recalls that 'I had given up meat for over six months simply out of regard for the feelings of the vegetarian co-prisoners ... I would rather go without it than injure my vegetarian brethren's susceptibilities' [Bacha Khan, quoted in Tendulkar, 1967: 174]. It was for the sake of humans rather than of animals that he would abstain from eating the latter. In his understanding of the essential nature of those humans, too, Khan differed from that of Gandhi. Banerjee's analysis of the gendered dimension of Khan's resistance to British colonialism which we have already seen draws the following distinction:

Badshah Khan's philosophical project in advocating non-violence was thus quite different from that of Gandhi ... In respect of non-violence, where Gandhi drew on [Hindu] traditions of androgyny, Badshah Khan instead drew on traditions of self-restraint ... Where Gandhi mocked and subverted British hyper-masculinity through androgyny, Badshah Khan and the KK subverted it by providing a countervailing image of *truly manful* restraint and self-control, as opposed to the cruelty and noisy bluster of the colonial 'mad dog'. [Banerjee, 2000: 212]

From all of the foregoing, we may draw a number of conclusions regarding the nature and implications of Bacha Khan's understanding of pacifism and nonviolence in Islam. In many respects, his position appears to be a relatively maximal and absolute one. His rejection of force encompasses both the foreign and the domestic; he does not distinguish between pacifism and nonviolence as some do. That rejection is, moreover, not only a matter of actions or of the harmony of nonviolent means and ends. Rather, it encompasses also the character and dispositions of the nonviolent actor [*niyyah*]. '*Adam-e tashaddud* (Khan's Pashto term for nonviolence) is not only the absence of violent acts but also the reform

of the character to prevent violent feelings and inclinations. His aim is a total reform not only of society but also of the characters of its members. His approach to this reform stands out in its emphasis on martial discipline and the resolute cultivation of moral courage.

It might, however, be observed that Bacha Khan neither goes so far as to declare violence to be *ipso facto* un-Islamic, nor attempts to deny or abrogate scriptural calls for violent *jihād*. Indeed, he actively embraces military practices and paraphernalia. This might incline one to regard his moral commitment not as absolute but as contingent. Yet Khan's case against violence is not strictly speaking a contingent one. He does not argue that warfare is prohibited because the conditions for truly just war do not at present practically obtain (cf. for instance Jawdat Said or Chaiwat Satha-Anand [see Chapters 6 and 7]). Rather, violent struggle [*jihād*] is universally demoted to an inferior qualitative status than non-violent struggle. Peace does not oppose or replace war, that is, but instead decisively surpasses it. He does not obviously proceed from the assumption of a binary opposition between war and peace so much as a hierarchy of virtues. His (re)interpretation of Islamic scripture, law, and tradition is not fundamentally a matter of the application of some systematic critical hermeneutic (cf. for instance Ali Shariati [see Chapter 4]), nor does it in principle rely upon the open challenge of existing practice other than *purdah* – which he does regard as a non-Islamic cultural accretion. Instead, Khan's reforms rely on a profound shifting of emphases. What was central becomes peripheral, and what might have been seen as supererogatory becomes obligatory.

Nevertheless, there are forms of violence which other advocates of similar paths to Bacha Khan see as important for which he has less regard. His accounts of injustice and oppression are urgent and often well justified. But they are also economically and politically unsophisticated. He identifies real injustices – notably the British imperial dominance of India and the gendered suppression of women – but offers little in the way of systemic critique of structural violence. His reluctance to question the workings of the global capitalism which undergirded the empire he opposed – from the British East India Company to the Raj – is a case in point. This was a critique so blindingly obvious that British colonial administrators struggled to believe he was not making it – as demonstrated by their frequent accusations of Bolshevism against him. Instead, he opposed cupidity and greed as moral vices; his main focus was on moral self-improvement rather than structural reform. Though he laments the widespread ignorance among Pakhtuns of their Pakhtun language, he



does not conceive of this in relation to power, cultural hegemony, or epistemological violence. His solution is simply to build schools which teach Pashto. His understanding of nonviolence is furthermore fundamentally anthropocentric and does not extend to non-human animals or the environment at large (cf. for instance Bawa Muhaiyaddeen and many present-day Muslims [see Chapters 3 and 7]).

Finally, one must recognise that the nature of Bacha Khan's own commitment to truth often manifested itself in a brusque directness and inflexibility which his interlocutors will naturally have experienced as hostility; he was no practitioner of what some psychologists term 'non-violent communication'. Episodes of high-minded obstinacy pepper his autobiography. These are always respectable but often unfortunate. One anecdote is particularly telling. On learning that the Congress Working Committee had embraced Partition, Khan was understandably distraught: 'revolted by the suggestion, [Khan] left the room soon thereafter, sat down on the stairs outside, put his hands on his head and uttered the same word twice, "*tobah* . . . *tobah*" [repentance, repentance]' [Ahmad, 2005: 24]. Before he left, his pragmatic friend and colleague Abul Kalam Azad gave him a very practical piece of advice, which pointed to the only real way forward for Khan and his movement:

Maulana Azad was sitting beside me. He advised me: 'You ought to join the Muslim League now.' It still makes me sad, and I still wonder what on earth made him say a thing like that. For the Maulana had always been as much against the Muslim League's principles and practices as I was. [Khan, 1969: 205]

Recalling the incident some two decades later, Bacha Khan still could not grasp the reasoning behind Azad's call to mend bridges with the new rulers of his country. Not only this, but Khan seems to have resented him for it. Instead, he would remain steadfast in his opposition to a new status quo, one forever tainted in his eyes by the bloody circumstances of its birth:

I am afraid I do not entertain any friendly feelings for Pakistan. Pakistan was founded on hatred. She was born not of love but of hatred and she grew up on hatred, on malice, on spite and hostility. Pakistan was created by the grace of the British in order that the Hindus and the Muslims might forever be at war and forget that they were brothers. Pakistan is unable to think in terms of peace and friendship. [Khan, 1969: 209–210]

The result of this uncompromising stance was by Khan's own admission a predictable persecution by the government of Pakistan which was 'more cruel, and more unjust than anything we had suffered under the

rule of the foreign infidels' [Khan, 1969: 208]. It led to the final suppression of his nonviolent army of Khudai Khidmatgars – though as Banerjee's oral history attests, its members often continued to identify with it decades later. For his part, Khan would continue his own resistance for the rest of his life, committed to the belief that '[r]eligion is also a movement. If selfless, undemanding and holy men and women join this movement it is bound to be successful. Such people will be a blessing to mankind' [Khan, 1969: 46].